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THE CHURCHMAN'S PULPIT

Volume XXVII

OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

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THE CHURCHMAN'S PULPIT

Being Sermons and Addresses for the Sundays,
Festivals and Holy Days of the Christian Year,
with Supplementary Volumes on Special Subjects.

Edited by the Rev.

J. HENRY BURN, B.D., F.R.S.E.,

Editor of "The Expositor's Library."

VOLUME XXVII
Old Testament Characters

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THE CHURCHMAN'S PULPIT

Old Testament Characters

Adam

BY REV. E. MONRO, M.A.

"So God created man in His own image," etc.—Genesis i. 27.

The name of Adam suggests to us at once the estate from which the human race has fallen, the cause of that fall, the vast forfeit that one man made to God; and naturally awakens in our own minds questions as to our lost inheritance. Would Adam have died if he had never fallen? If he had lived, would he have continued in Paradise, or been translated into Heaven? What was his condition in Paradise? Was it one of probation and of interior sufferings dependent on such a state, or was it one of entire freedom from all such trial? And lastly, was Adam indued with a supernatural power, or did he simply depend on the gifts of his original creation? To these four questions I will append one brief inquiry in addition. Had our first parents a claim to eternal happiness by the right of their original creation, or in virtue of some covenant made with them by God?

With regard then to the first of the above questions, a very slight examination of Holy Scripture will assure us that Adam would not have died in an unfallen state. As is always the case in the direct intercourse of God with His creature, a covenant was made between the two, the terms of which were clearly defined. "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"; and the woman, in stating the terms of the covenant, says, "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Now these propositions clearly involve the power of inversion, and imply that, in the event of their not eating the forbidden fruit, they shall live and not die; that is, their death was simply and only dependent on breach of the covenant.

The same point is clearly ascertained by a comparison of 1 Cor. xv. and Rom. v., both with the separate parts of each and one with another. In the former chapter, we are told that, "in Adam all died, and in Christ all are made alive." If it be objected to the validity of this passage, in proof of the above position, that the death here referred to is rather spiritual than natural, the force of the objection is at once weakened by a reference to the remaining part of the chapter, where the whole aim is to enforce the kind of life in Christ spoken of in the twenty-second verse; not a spiritual but a physical life in the resurrection of the natural body. This being established, it is manifest that the former clause of the twenty-second verse refers to the death of the same natural body; verses 42, 43, 44 most clearly show that the aim of St. Paul is to establish a truth with a reference to the body, not the soul.

Again, in the words, "all die," we see a further proof of our position, where the common lot of all mankind, natural death, is evidently referred to. Nevertheless, we are not to imagine that Adam possessed an inherent power of immortality in virtue of his original creation; as the following passage shows a contrast between the inherent powers of the bodies of the first and Second Adam (1 Cor. xv. 45.) "The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit"; that is, the first Adam enjoyed a life given him from above, while the Second Adam possessed in Himself a fountain of life, not only perpetuating itself, but imparting the gift of life to others. Consequently while we believe that Adam would not have died had he not fallen, we at the same time believe that he retained his life by a continual act of renewal of its lease from God.

Again, in the forty-sixth verse, we find "that was not first which is spiritual, but that which was natural"; where the corruptible nature of Adam's original body seems contrasted with the incorruptible nature of our Lord's.

These proofs seem sufficient to show that, without doubt, Adam would have been sustained above the reach of natural death had he not fallen, until his translation from Paradise to Heaven.

I will now approach the second branch of the subject, namely, the question, whether Adam would have remained, had he not fallen, an inhabitant of Paradise; or been translated into the immediate presence of God in Heaven. There seem to be four especial reasons, amongst many others, for concluding that the latter would have been the case; for, in the first place, it is apparent that in the case of all covenants, such as those which God made with man, there is a punishment annexed to the breach of the terms of such covenant, and a reward annexed to their fulfilment; and inasmuch as this punishment would involve a worse condition for the fallen party than the one which he occupied at the period of the ratification of the covenant; so, on the other hand, a superior condition is the reward of the fulfilment of those terms. Now the fall of Adam at once brought upon him the loss of Paradise, that is, the inferior condition; and, by parity of reasoning, had he not fallen but endured his probation, it would have secured to him translation to Heaven itself, or a superior condition. But before I go further, it might be well to adduce one or two instances in God's dealings with mankind, of the nature of moral covenants referred to above, and first with regard to the covenant made by God with Abraham.

The obedience of Abraham was to entail upon him and his heirs the enjoyment and possession of a land, in which at that moment Abraham was but a stranger; that is, the fulfilment of his terms of the covenant was to place him in a far higher position than the one he at that time occupied.

In the covenant God made with His own people the children of Israel, their permanent possession of the land that flowed with milk and honey, and the final subjugation of their enemies, were the great reward offered to a people who were as yet but adventurers by the Red Sea. But in the event of their non-fulfilment of the terms of their covenant, they were to be a scattered and homeless people, as they are at this moment; as much below their expectation and condition when they left Egypt, as their permanent possession of their land would have been a superior condition to the one they were now placed in. In our own covenant with God, a state as much below the one we now occupy, as His militant Church on earth, will be the result of final disobedience, as our state of glory will be above it.

But I pass on to the second reason on which I base my belief that Adam would have been eventually translated to Heaven. He was clearly possessed of the perfect power of self-will; he had vast and manifold opportunities of exercising it; he was placed in the immediate presence of a piercing temptation; he daily passed the tree of knowledge on his visit to the tree of life. So acute was that temptation, that in spite of the continual presence of Jehovah, of the purity of the nature hitherto innocent, of the innate image of God, he exercised that power of free will, and he fell. For what could all of the powers have been given him? and why should he have been placed in such a position, unless some great attainment beyond what he at that moment enjoyed was to be placed within his grasp? To imagine otherwise would be inconsistent with the whole analogy of God's providence.

But, thirdly, I spoke above of the external support which was continually necessary from the Divine Being for the preservation of Adam's natural life; a state of continued exertion is unnatural to the Deity; a state of repose is His true condition; consequently we cannot imagine but that the first Adam was eventually to have been placed in a position in which continued life was natural to him. Even the daily visit of the Almighty to the garden of Eden implied a transitory, and not a permanent condition.

But, fourthly, though the fact of sinning involved death to the natural; it by no means follows that the absence of sin leaves that natural body in the same condition, but rather we should expect it would tend to elevate it, as much as the fall into sin depressed it.

I will now pass on to the third head, the moral condition of our first parents in Eden. There is a popular impression, not unfrequently given children and ignorant persons, that our first parents were in a state of entire freedom from any kind of suffering. Now the presence of an object highly desirable to the eye and the mind, while the moral agent is fully possessed of the power of free-will and yet under a strong

bias towards a different direction from that desire, in itself implies a condition of very considerable mental suffering, and in this condition clearly our first parents were placed, for we are distinctly told that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the first place highly desirable to the eye; and secondly, to the mind, inasmuch as it imparted the keenest knowledge of right and wrong; consequently no misapprehension could be greater than that our first parents were without probation, and all its attending trials; more than, we are bound to consider how intense must have been the desire after knowledge, a thing in itself so innocent and elevated, in so sublime a creature as Adam was, fresh from the hands of the Creator, and having as yet no bias in favour of wickedness; besides which, some exquisite external beauty seems to have arrayed the tree of knowledge, which made it the more fascinating to Adam and Eve, as we gather from the terms that it was desirable to the eye. From all this it is clear Adam was in a state of very keen probation. God's object was, to induce him to find all his happiness simply in serving Him in eating of the fruit of the tree of life; while Adam yearned after the fruits of knowledge, which, when sought separately from the will of God, is simply sought for its own sake and partakes largely of the character of sin. To this temptation he yielded; it pierced through the joints and marrow; it penetrated his vitals, and he sunk; and with him, as when a mighty pillar falls, fell the whole fabric of after ages, the fragments of which lie to this day scattered in disjointed atoms around the pillar, which, once their support, became their ruin. But though disjointed, they are each of them perfect and entire, waiting for another hand to replace them round a pillar which shall stand for ever.

And while on this point we cannot but be struck with the nature of that temptation under which Adam fell, so similar to the prevailing temptation of the day we live in, when multitudes climb the tree of knowledge to gather its manifold fruits which hang and glitter like jewels in the sunshine of this world, and having gathered them, repose beneath its shadow without seeing the serpent that coils amidst its boughs. But they do not go on to the tree of life, which stands beyond it offering its leaves to the healing of nations. Knowledge without godliness is the tendency and bane of our age.

But I must pass on to our fourth and last head. With what power did Adam approach the scene of his temptation? Was it with the original power of his creation or some supernatural gift of the Spirit? Surely with the latter. And it is of great importance that this point should be thoroughly established, inasmuch as the followers of Pelagius and Socinus rest many of their heretical doctrines on the supposition of God having directed Adam to meet the assault of the evil one, with no power greater than that of his original nature.

It seems most clear to any thoughtful and candid mind, that the Creator endued the protoplast with powers from above especially suited to his spiritual trial, and that, in consequence, the same supernatural gift is bestowed upon all his descendants; nor only this, but that it is absolutely necessary towards the successful completion of their probation. The early Church in every age largely dwelt upon this truth; "that Spirit," says St. Cyril, "Which formed him after the Divine image, and as a seal was secretly impressed on his soul, was separated from him when he fell." "That same image," says St. Ambrose, "was Adam made after, before his sin, but when he fell, he laid aside the image of the Heavenly, and assumed the image of the earthly, and the angels of darkness stripped him of the garments of saving grace." "As soon as he transgressed the commandments," says St. Austin, "being wholly stripped within of the grace of God forsaking him, he looked upon himself." "He that was made," says Tatian, "after the image of God, that more powerful Spirit withdrawing from him, became mortal." "Those things," says Justin Martyr, "are not without signification, which are written, that God, in the beginning, planted the tree of life in the midst of Paradise, pointing out the way of life by knowledge, of which knowledge our first parents not making a holy use were, by the imposture of the serpent, stripped and divested; for neither is there life without knowledge, nor certain knowledge without true life, therefore, both trees were planted near together."

Such, and many more, are the testimonies of the early Church in the Apostolic day to this great truth. But passing by, for the present, the testimony of antiquity, it must seem apparent from the reason of the thing, that if our first parents had been intended only for an earthly or Paradisaic state, the supernatural gift would have been needless.

but on the contrary, if they were intended for a supernatural condition, they needed, and therefore received supernatural gifts.

But again, "God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life," that is, together with his soul the principle of his natural life, he received also the gift of the Holy Spirit as the principle of Divine life. The famous passage from Philo-Judæus, living near the time of our Lord Himself, tells us on this very passage, Gen. ii. 7, that the intention of the passage bears to the point that God only inspires the highest faculties of the soul, the mind, and that Adam received this Divine principle at his creation, that he might be raised to the saving knowledge of God, which he never could have reached by his natural powers. And, indeed, as Bishop Bull reminds us, the Jewish Rabbis continually distinguished between the living soul, the spirit, or the rational soul, and the inspiration or Divine breathing, which as they tell us he received at his creation; which Divine breathing or *pneuma* is clearly a spiritual power above ordinary, to which division St. Paul refers, 1 Thess. v. 23, in speaking of the spirit, soul, and body, where as a man learned in Levitical distinctions, and brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, he adopts the distinctions above referred to, the spirit meaning that supernatural power with which we are endued.

Again, the learned prelate reminds us, that St. Paul in Ephesians iv. 23, where he is urging them to be renewed by the spirit of their minds, adopts the Jewish phraseology, and means by the spirit of their minds to refer to that supernatural agency by which they were created after God's image. Further reasons seem to show us the probability of his possessing this elevating nature. He was made the friend and companion of the Lord Himself, when He walked in the garden in the cool of the day, which we can scarcely conceive a creature doing unless he possessed a spiritual nature.

One or two more passages in St. Paul's Epistles seem to refer to the same distinction. Col. iii. 9, &c. speaks of our being renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created us; and to the Ephesians he speaks of being renewed in knowledge. Now the word "renew," means, is to restore a thing to its former state, which evidently refers to a previous state of spiritual power.

We cannot, again, pass by the ingenious suggestions of the writer above referred to, made on the consideration of Adam's power to give fitting names to every object of God's creation, a power which the most thoughtful men have ever declared to have been more than human.

So again, the moment Adam beheld Eve, he knew she had been taken from his side, even though on that occasion he was in a deep sleep, and he described the future condition and position of the woman with an accuracy and appreciation which none but Divine power could have given.

I must now conclude the line of argument I have been following out. The doctrine it involves is all-important; that it is not the aim of God to make simply the good happy, but those who have passed through a successful probation; consequently, all final appeals from the bar of His justice to that of His mercy in the case of impenitence is wholly beside the mark. Our whole life is the perpetual ratification or annulling of the terms of a covenant. When Adam daily resorted to his Maker as his companion, when as yet the thread of his moral being had not become entangled with repeated sin; while the eyesight of his conscience had not become dim, nor the natural force of the image of God abated; if within grasp of the visible and tangible tree of life, if while he sojourned amidst the lights and shadows of Paradise, and saw in every unwithering leaf and eternal flower, the actual reflection of the Heaven that lay beyond; if with all this, he fell; if this armour were not proof, if even he bathed in such a medicated flood, had yet a heel vulnerable to the shaft of the tempter,—what reason have not we to fear that our moral nature is a tangle? The records only of our past are of continuous fall. "The King is only known to us" in His beauty "in a land which is very far off." We see Him, "but not nigh, we behold Him, but not now." He no longer walks "in the cool of the day." We are vulnerable at all points. Indeed the echoes of that voice should be heard round the silent chambers of our heart, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!"

The serpent began his deadly work with such amazing success that the race of mankind fled before him through the gate of Eden stung, poisoned, vanquished. They

fled through the briers and brambles of the great world outside; and as they fly the serpent still pursues, and God permits it.

Oh how anxiously should we strive to reach that other gate of Paradise where He stands, Who "took not on Him the nature of Angels" with no flaming sword but with the key that "opens and no man shuts"; Who speaks with no voice that warns from the tree of life, but cries in the accents of matchless love "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He Who does not drive out the man, but says "Verily, to-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," He Who has not sent us out to till the dust from whence we were taken; but having moistened that dust with His sweat of blood, and gathered its brambles to bind on His brow, says to every fugitive from the pursuing serpent, "Return to the Lord, for He will have mercy upon you, and to your God, for He will abundantly pardon you."

Adam

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"For as in Adam all die," etc.—1 Corinthians xv. 22.

The state of our first parents in Paradise must always be a mystery to us; we can form no conception of a condition in which there was no death, and none of the sad company of death, sin and fear and care and pain. But in this our ignorance all has been told us which is good for us to know; and their trial and fall is so like what we ourselves experience, that we understand it but too well. We find in ourselves the like mystery of evil when we sin against better knowledge, forfeit our great strength, choose death instead of life, and give up our God in exchange for some passing temptation.

First of all, then, we read that God made man in His own image and likeness, capable of knowing and loving Him as the inferior creatures could not; He set him in dominion over them; He endowed him too with every gift which the perfection of his nature required; He imparted to him an intimate knowledge of all the creatures, so that he could give them suitable names such as God approved; He placed him in a garden, which He is described as, in some especial and pre-eminent manner, furnishing very richly for his use; He added also an associate, whom, as a part of himself, he might cherish with a more intimate love; and, more than all, God Himself conversed with him, without his being overcome with shame or fear, and, as it is described, walked with him in the garden. Thus He made him to be like His own image below, crowned above all the creatures with understanding, and adorned with gifts both within and without. But this was not all—for God made with Adam a covenant of everlasting life, dependent on his obedience, annexing to that obedience the gift of immortality; for in addition to all other gifts was the Tree of Life, and hard by it in the midst of the garden, the Tree of Knowledge, to be the trial of obedience. Thus was he called by this covenant of grace from all earthly pleasures and endowments, to the "more excellent way" of charity; that charity which is "proof against" all temptations; charity which "never faileth"; charity which is content to be without the "knowledge that puffeth up"; which obeys because it loves, and loves because it trusts, and is therefore ever wont to look up to and to lean on God; till faith, "rooted and grounded in love," when perfected by obedience, might be translated to a higher and securer state of bliss with God Himself in Heaven. And the place of this covenant of grace was "in the midst of the garden": as the sun is the centre of the universe, which without him would be dead; so did obedience to this one command give order and beauty to that Paradise, when all was obedient to man, because man was obedient to God.

Thus were they in a state of perfect innocence and happiness: but their life was not in themselves, it was dependent on God, and they were made to feel this their dependence upon Him, in their liability to fall; it was therefore a life of faith, because it was a condition of trial and obedience. Their happiness was in the love of God, in Whose likeness they were made; and while they had that love, faith in Him would be

their strength, and obedience their delight. The free gift is made them that they "may eat of every tree of the garden," except one only; and when that one exception is made, it is with the promise of life on their obedience. If they eat not of that forbidden tree they shall live; and therefore with that Tree of Knowledge is the Tree of Life. And as God giveth not as man giveth, but liberally and abundantly beyond words, we may conclude that therein was implied that such obedience would lead to a more perfect and blissful immortality. For their present life on earth was then precarious, and dependent on means from without, that Tree of Life to which they had access; it was not of that "Well of Life" which is with God, which is from within, ever "springing up into everlasting life."

Moreover, another peculiar gift is spoken of. It is said that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and in consequence "man became a living soul," i.e., a soul capable of that better life which is in God. For what was this breath of God but that He infused into him of His Divine Spirit, clothed him with that vesture of immortality, whereby after having been created in the similitude of God, he might look up to Heaven, as "waiting for the revelation of the sons of God," and the crown and fulness of that Angelic nature? Thus then was it that God had not only "set him over the works of His hands," but He "visited him," and "crowned him with glory and worship." He had set His love on the man He had formed, and in this the greatness of His love, He sought for the love of man in return, his free love and choice, which could only be shown by this obedience.

And now we come to the mysterious origin of evil, which has been ever since so intimately with us, which wraps us about as our very clothing, enters into us as the food we eat, as the air we breathe, is with us, in us, and about us, and lets not go its hold on us till we die. But "the serpent said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Here, then, we have disclosed in its fulness the existence and craft of an evil spirit bent on our ruin; and his entering into the serpent, as afterwards, by our Lord's permission, the devils entering into the swine, sets before us how they may take possession of those whom God hath made, and hence of the body and soul of man. Add to which that his making the creature the instrument of evil, seems to account for the animal creation around us being united and sharing, for some mysterious reasons, in the sufferings of mankind.

"And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Now though Eve was as yet sinless, we may see in this reply the first faint tendency to her falling away from God. The command which God had given to Adam was, "Thou shalt not eat of it," but Eve adds here the words, "Neither shall ye touch it." She overstates, as it were, the prohibition; like the Pharisees afterwards whom our Lord condemned, she thus added to the word of God. Nor is this all; for at the same time she diminishes from it, for God had said to Adam, "Thou shalt surely die," or "Dying thou shalt die," which is a very strong expression; but she softens it down, and says merely, "Lest ye die." She adds to God's word like the Pharisee—she takes away from it like the Sadducee. She adds to the command—takes away from the warning. Thus all is gradual, the serpent insinuates a poisonous question, then Eve doubts God's word, and then the serpent denies it. "Lest ye die," says Eve. "Ye shall not die," adds the tempter.

While this is at work in the heart, what follows? "I have made a covenant with mine eyes," says Job, taught by the sad experience of mankind; but not so was it now. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise." All her life and bliss was in God, and in union with God; but now she desired something out of God. For these three things contain all the temptations to which mankind are subject, as St. John states them, "the lust of the flesh," for it was good for food; "the lust of the eyes," for it was pleasant to behold; and "the pride of life," for it was to be desired to make one wise, yea, as gods. "All these," says St. John, "are not of the Father, but are of the world"; and "if any man love the world, the love to the Father is not in him."

Thus are these temptations put in motion by Satan; he stealthily approaches like a serpent wherever he finds access, advancing by little and little with great subtlety, first through the creature, then by the weaker vessel; tempting the woman by the fruits of the garden, in which as a serpent he lay hid, and thus winding his way to

the man as it were on the weaker side, by his love for the woman, through that new and great gift, the love of his espousals. And what is the first result of this act of disobedience? Instead of the likeness of God, Eve puts on the likeness of Satan; she at once takes part with the serpent; she also now acts as a tempter, and, in so doing, brings death on one whom she loved; "She gave to her husband, and he did eat." So is it with sin at all times; no one falls alone; those nearest and dearest are often injured by every sin of ours—and, oh! terrible thought, may lose on our account life eternal. Here in the germ is the fullness of all sin; some secret presumption that goes before a fall; then the devil tempting; then doubt of God; and then evil curiosity; and then the influence of example which spreads the sin, that fearful net of the wicked one, entangling all around in the society of evil.

Their innocence was gone—their covenant with God was broken—of their better nature shame alone remained; in this shame alone is their hope, inasmuch as it is an acknowledgment of sin, and might therefore lead to repentance. Disobeying God, their own nature was no longer obedient to themselves, and they were ashamed of it, for it had other desires than the will of God, "another law in their members bringing them into captivity to the law of sin." And whereas before they knew nothing but good, they now know both good and evil, the knowledge which it would have been infinitely better never to have had, the knowledge of evil spirits, of the good they have lost, of the evil they have chosen. "They saw that they were naked," for not till then were they divested of God's righteousness; the clothing of His sanctifying Spirit, when without shame or fear they conversed with God: but now they seek for covering from that shame; such has ever been the effort of mankind, with the fading leaves of worldly objects to cover themselves; secretly conscious of their nakedness and deep internal poverty without God. "They cover with a covering," says the Prophet, "but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin."

And they, "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" Into what abyss of misery art thou fallen? from what grace and hope art thou lost?

And now if Eve had before acted as Satan the tempter, so Adam is now as Satan the accuser, for he says, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Here is no humiliation—no confession. Yes, I did eat; the woman gave me, and Thou gavest me the woman; it is all from Thee! Oh, sad change, what a return to God for all His gifts! They hide among the trees, they cover their shame with leaves; and now with pretext and excuse.

"And the woman said, the serpent beguiled me and I did eat." She too, as Adam, casts the guilt upon another; yet here indeed there is in some sort confession of sin; and therefore gives ground for pardon. But oh, how much has mankind to suffer before they come to that true contrition of heart which says with the Psalmist, "I said, Lord, have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." The afflictions of Job; the trials of Joseph; the endurance of Moses; the contrition of David; the confessions of Daniel; the sorrows of the Prophets; the tears of St. Peter; the travails of St. Paul; the sufferings of Saints and the blood of Martyrs; have yet to prove this humiliation of man, in order that he might be accepted in the Second Adam; and these answers of our first parents may be undone or amended. And this healing is in the merciful sentence, "in sorrow shalt thou bring forth": and "in sorrow shalt thou eat," "till thou return unto the ground." Yea, the very voice of the accepted One shall be heard as it were from the ground, and speaking from the dust of death, "I am a worm and no man." Thus not in sorrow only but in death itself shall be found the means and hope of restoration; when "love shall be stronger than death"; and dying in Christ; yea, exercised in dying shall bring forth more abundant life; for in conformity to Christ's death in life.

Thus, in taking the shame, and the sorrow, and the death, Christ restores again to the Paradise of God. For this Paradise is the Church of God, "the garden inclosed," on which, as "the winds blow, the spices flow out"; wherein is the "well of living waters." And there too is the Tree of Life which hath "leaves," it is said, "for the healing of the nations"; there is also in it a river not from the ground as in that Eden of old, but "proceeding out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb." Wherein He Himself says, "I will give to him that overcometh to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." For, in Him they shall, He says, "have right to the

Tree of Life." In the centre of that garden; yea, "in the midst of the Paradise of God," restoring all again to love, and harmony, and peace, is He Himself; in Whom is there a better knowledge and a better life which He will impart to them that love Him; for in Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and "our life is hid with Christ in God." In that Paradise He Himself walks again with man, for it is said, "I will walk among you, and be your God, and ye shall be My people." Yea, He hath clothed their shame again with the covering of His righteousness, and hath said, "They shall walk with Me in white." And "they shall see His face." He hath again renewed them in His image. Nay more, by another transcendental endowment of which that in Paradise was the sign, on His rising from the dead, He hath "breathed into their nostrils the breath of life," by the gift of His Spirit; that in the likeness of His resurrection, "putting on the new man," they may be again "created after God in righteousness and true holiness";—that like Adam of old, they may keep His commandments, and by keeping them in this Paradise of trial which is His Church, they may at length be fitter for a better Paradise, and the Presence of God in Heaven.

Cain and Abel

BY RIGHT REV. H. E. RYLE, D.D.

"Cain rose up against Abel his brother," etc.—Genesis iv. 8.

The religious teaching conveyed by the story of Cain and Abel relates to the subjects of sin, man's fallen nature, and the attitude of the Almighty towards the sinner.

1. As to sin, it teaches that propensity to it is transmitted from one generation to another. The sin of Adam and Eve is followed by that of Cain. The sin of disobedience to God is followed by the violation of human brotherhood. The first sign of sin's prevalence in the family of Adam is the murder of Cain. The rejection of God's love leads at once to the renunciation of human affection. There was no love to God, no willingness to listen to the Divine voice, in Cain. The occasion of the sacrifice is the temptation by which his character is put to the test. Self-will, pride, jealousy, these are the steps by which the thought of deliberate murder is reached. Cain becomes the archetype of sin and the antithesis of the character of Christ. "Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John iii. 15, 16). Cain, according to the teaching of Israelite theology, personified the action of sin in human society. Hatred against fellowmen is the fruit of rebellion against God. "For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the evil, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John iii. 11, 12). Worship offers no safeguard against temptation. An act of sacrifice had no withstraining influence over the murderous intention. Thus, in this early page of Genesis, we find an anticipation of the condemnation, pronounced on those that sought to honour God with the lip though the heart was far from Him (cf. Isa. xxix. 13; Mark vii. 6).

2. As regards human nature, the picture of Cain and Abel portrayed how, from the first, the opposition has subsisted between the good and the evil, between faith and self-will, between obedience and lawlessness. The two brothers, brought up in the same family, engaged in the same act of worship, become the types, the one of sin, the other of righteousness. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts" (Heb. xi. 4). The approach to God, in the rite of sacrifice, was in Abel's case no mere outward form, but the true expression of his heart's desire to draw near to God. This was true "righteousness"; and it is thus that "the blood of righteous Abel" (Matt. xxiii. 35) stands at the head of the roll of martyrs, who paid with their lives for the inward yearning of their hearts towards God.

It was thus that "righteous Abel" became a type of the true Israel, of the Prophets who witnessed for Jehovah against their countrymen, and, in the highest sense, of the

suffering Servant, Who was Himself a sacrifice for sin. For, as the preference shown to Abel's sacrifice evoked Cain's murderous resolve, so the manifestation of perfect purity and innocence "convicted the world in respect of sin" (John xvi. 8). The death of Abel strikes a prophetic note of warning. It proclaims the great opposition, of which we find the climax in John i. 11, "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." And we turn instinctively to another message of encouragement amid suffering, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (cf. John xv. 18-24).

Once more, the narrative teaches that God left not Himself without witness, even with those who had estranged themselves from Him. The words spoken to Cain (vers. 6, 7) were the Divine witness, reminding us of the spiritual office of conscience, to the heart that had given itself up to the service of sin. If Cain hears rebuke, he receives also both exhortation and promise. But Cain is a free agent. He is under no compulsion to obey God, he is at liberty to hearken to or to reject the voice that comes to him. His sin is the outcome of the abuse of that free-will, the Divine gift of which he has received by inheritance from the first parents.

Not least, the narrative teaches the interdependency of the human race, the obligations which we are under, the one to the other. The lesson that we are our "brothers' keepers" has been little learned. And yet how much has the thought of it been drawn from the scene so simply and so vividly represented, in which Cain, confronted with his crime, and reminded of his duty of love to his brother, endeavours to repudiate his responsibility? (ver. 9).

3. In respect of its teaching about God, the narrative presents Him to us as long-suffering towards the sinner, as well as compassionate towards the innocent sufferer. He Who arraigns Cain for the crime had, before its commission, warned him of his fault, and urged him to well-doing. Nothing escapes His eye, nothing is hid from His knowledge. It is not for the faithlessly offered sacrifice, but for the unseen passion of Cain's heart that the Lord calls him to reason.

The sin is no sooner committed than it comes under judgment. The punishment is heavier than it had been in the case of Adam and Eve. They were driven from Eden, out of the Divine presence. Cain is driven from the neighbourhood of Eden. The earth shall refuse to give him continual sustenance; he shall roam from spot to spot; he is to be for ever homeless, unloved, a vagabond. But though banished from the sight, he is not shut out from the mercy of God. The judgment is tempered with compassion. Cain, though more terrified than penitent, receives the assurance of protection from blood-revenge. The favour of a token for good is granted to the first murderer; and symbolism is consecrated, in its earliest use, to hold a pledge of Divine love before the sinner's eyes.

Cain and Abel

BY REV. CHARLES M. SOUTHGATE.

"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground," etc.—Genesis iv. 3-13.

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE.

1. Here is the world's loveliest picture, the earliest Madonna, perhaps the fairest, basking over her babe. In the rapture that feels him to be a Divine gift, she names him Cain, "Gotten"; "I have gotten a man with Jehovah," as if she thought the promised Redeemer already given. But when the second child is in her arms, foreboding has displaced hope. This one is Abel, "Breath," vanishing vapour. Alas! poor Eve. Till this day your daughters prove how a mother's joy may become a mother's grief, delight measure distress. The beginnings of social and industrial life are here. Life means work, and the two sons take different kinds of work. Division of labour is fundamental in the plan of the universe. Biology shows that life starts with the simple cell. Then cells multiply in groups; and as separate cells take up unlike functions, nutrition or reproduction or motion, so is developed all the wondrous variety of organisms on this teeming earth. Evolution is from the simple to the complex. The complicated mesh of industrial and commercial life is forecast when Cain becomes a tiller of the soil and Abel a keeper of sheep.

2. Worship also begins. To home and toil is joined the altar. It is not said that sacrifice was Divinely ordained, but we can hardly think it an intuitive impulse of the natural soul. What could the man see in the slaying of an ignorant and innocent lamb that should make him stand better with a holy God? But the thought of substitution, once suggested, is instinctively grasped by the guilty conscience, and a progressive revelation leads up to the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world. Calvary satisfies wholly this craving of guilt for propitiation. This strengthens the natural conclusion that one element in the faith that made Abel's offering acceptable was the sense of guilt and need of propitiation met by the shedding of blood, an experience wholly wanting in Cain's sacrifice of a mere thank-offering. The first worshippers could walk with God in the freedom of innocence and obedience. After the Fall, that approach is lost. Obedience is a causeway swept down by flood. The spirit must now reach its God over the bridge of faith hung from above. But the bitterest of all beginnings in our lesson is the first death. A sculptor has wrought in marble, full life-size, this mother lifting the dead son from the ground, gazing into his face with unspeakable questionings. No answer from the fond lips—no look from the gentle eyes—what can it mean? Awe, terror, and heart-breaking grief struggle in her features. It is hard enough, God knows, after all these centuries to take into the heart this mystery, horror, and agony of death! What must it have been to hearts all unprepared! Thank God once more for life and incorruption brought to light through the Gospel.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SIN.

Evil, once introduced, seems to have the right of way. Philosophize about it as we may, sinful parents beget sinful children. Man moves with a shadow at his side, dark and distorted pattern of his true self, intercepting light that shines from God. A bad heart makes worthless worship. Cain stands beside his rejected offering, downcast, and very wroth. But worse is at hand unless he repents. What a startling picture this of the man at his tent door, and sin, tiger-like, crouching in the shadow, quivering to spring upon him as he comes out. To meet temptation is a sinner's fate; it is part of the penalty of sin. His call is to fight it, his honour to master it. But God's warning is rejected, the temptation unresisted. Jealousy is fanned to hatred, hatred blazes out in murder. "The beast without has become the beast within." The child whom the fond mother named "Gotten with God" stands with hands dripping with a brother's blood. So terribly rapid is the ripening of sin. Might not the race have waited a few generations before such terrific payment of its wages? Other truths are made conspicuous. These earliest accounts are notable for emphasizing the fact that God is not slack concerning evil. Cain finds immediately, as did Adam and Eve, that God has not ignored his crime. His Maker takes personal account of the sin, denounces its guilt, adjusts the punishment, watches its execution. Is punishment remedial? Not of necessity; not in this test case which stands so conspicuously at the beginning. Punishment does not, of necessity, soften the heart; it may harden it. Instead of arousing godly sorrow and longing for reconciliation, it may but stimulate sullen self-will. Instead of contrition of penitence we see only the attrition of selfish desire to escape just reward of suffering. Cain goes out into the land of Nod, "Wandering," an exile from home and from a share in God's plan. After five generations his seed disappears from the record. Over him, as over those outside the Holy City in the final Revelation, closes a darkness in which sounds no joy, shines no light.

III. A STUDY IN BROTHERHOOD.

The tie which binds those born in the same home is the deepest and strongest in human nature. It means closest fellowship, helpfulness, love. The mysterious but mighty force of heredity, lying back of education, of will itself, links soul to soul. Nourished in the same arms, growing up in the same helpful care; inheriting a common hope; worshipping at the same altar, lifting heart and hands to the same God; truly life is bound to life. No purer affection lightens this world than the sweet companionship of the home, enswathing infant lives, expanding in the sports and ambitions of youth, enriching mature years, softening the austerities of age and death. Peculiarly beautiful is the relation of the older brother or sister to the younger. De Quincey's tribute to his sister is among the classics of both literature and life. George Eliot's sweet poem "Brother and Sister" reveals heart history in its pretty story and impressive close:—

But were another childhood world my share,
I would be born a little sister there.

But the first child slew his brother. Sin spoils anything, even God's best gifts. Beware of jealousy. It is the wild beast crouching at the door, which, once seizing its victim, perchance quits not its hold till the very heart's blood is drained. No other sin is cause of more evil in homes, no other more easily starts, is less noticed and rebuked.

But all the race are brothers, whether through these first parents or under God the Father of all. Question biology again, and it declares that in every individual is some actual atom, however infinitesimal, that was in each one of his ancestors, even back to father Adam. And the Word of God declares Him to be the Father of us all. To raise the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is to join the party of Cain who was of that wicked one and slew his brother. No need here to show how all dangers and hopes of social and national life root back in this question and the answer given to it. Capital and labour, combinations and trades-unions, lock-outs and strikes; nationalism, socialism, anarchy; popular government or monarchy; education, compulsory, public, private, secular or religious; immigration, school, ballot, lynch-law South or West; the red Indian with his reservation or his citizenship; the Chinaman inoffensive yet most offensive to some; every branch and form of Church-work, out to the conversion of the world's heathen; all these are suggestions of the meaning and demands of this first brother's question in the civilization and salvation of this twentieth century. Relationship through Adam is no strong force to conjure with. But it is a living truth that sonship with God means brotherhood with man. Love God with all the heart, and to love our neighbour as ourself is a sure consequence. All who long for a better social condition must come back at last to the great and true Elder Brother. Through Him find God the Father; then and then only, will man be seen and treated as our brother.

God takes account of sin. For this it is not necessary that the sinner should acknowledge his responsibility. Punishment comes, and that punishment is in the hand of God. Fear of punishment is not sorrow for sin—Cain showed no remorse; remorse is not repentance; repentance is not restoration. Punishment follows sin as a natural result, wages paid, fruit reaped. Reconciliation, repentance, redemption, need the intervention of grace.

All the paths of the Bible lead to Christ. This bitter tragedy shows the need and the glory that God should give us an Elder Brother, Who shall be not destroyer but Redeemer; shall win to Himself, thus to His God and our God, thus to the lowliest or the loftiest child of man as our own close kindred. This is indeed the Son Whom the first mother vainly looked for in the first child, Whom every Hebrew mother under the covenant looked to find in her own babe. "Who offered Himself an acceptable sacrifice, Whose blood speaketh better than that of Abel." The blood of Abel's sacrifice, by itself alone, was but the cry of a helpless guilt for escape. The blood of the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world. The blood of Abel himself cried from the outraged earth to the listening Heaven for vengeance. The blood of Christ, crimsoning the earth at the foot of the Cross, makes full atonement and sprinkles the guilty heart from an evil conscience.

Cain and Abel

BY REV. C. P. EDEN, M.A.

"Cain talked with Abel his brother," etc.—Genesis iv. 8.

The death of righteous Abel by his brother's hand stands out in sad prominence in the early history of our race. It is the one historical fact which comes between, and fills up the space between, the fall of our first parents and the great judgment, the Flood; testifying how grievously the power of evil had come in and possessed the human heart, when of two brothers—small enough family to want one another's society and love—one could raise his hand against the other, and deprive him of life.

The tale is briefly told: of the two sons of Adam, Abel being a keeper of sheep, Cain a tiller of the ground, the one, "it came to pass in process of time," the elder brother, "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord, and Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Differently were the offerings of the two regarded from on high: "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very

wroth, and his countenance fell." And the Almighty is represented as addressing, as remonstrating (may I say), with the embittered and sullen man. But it did not avail; sadly, dreadfully the reverse: "Cain," we read, "talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." The rest of the story, the sequel, how that the Lord came and called to the guilty man, "Where is Abel thy brother?" and he answered falsely and sullenly; falsely, "I know not;" sullenly, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and the Lord told him that his brother's blood cried unto Him, and he should suffer heavily for what he had done, and be under a curse: "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth"; and how that Cain replied in desponding agony, and "went out from the presence of the Lord"; this I do not propose to dwell upon at present. I would fix your thoughts upon the evil deed itself, the deed of wrath and violence; and I would lead you to observe what the causes were which had power to irritate so intensely the mind of Cain, and to raise his hand against his brother's life.

I gain my information from Holy Scripture itself. The wrathful feeling of Cain against Abel, and the cause of that wrath, are mentioned in two places of the Scripture: in the Book of Genesis, the passage, viz., before us, and in 1 John iii. 12. In the latter place the Apostle speaks of "Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him?" he goes on to ask; he answers, "Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Here the history of the one brother's enmity against the other is briefly given; Cain was jealous of the superior goodness of Abel, and the greater measure of favour and approval with which he was regarded from on high. Each of the two brothers acknowledged a God on high, and the claim He had to their worship and service; and each of them offered a service, an outwardly religious service, to God. But the one's service was accepted, the other's was not accepted. Of this difference between the light in which the one brother's service was regarded by the Almighty, and the light in which the other's was regarded, an account is given, and which might be thought sufficient, in that passage of St. John's Epistle which I have read to you. The one brother was a good man, holy in life, his works righteous; the other was of contrary character, his works evil; therefore did the Almighty accept the offering of the one and not of the other. God receives a good man's offering, that which a bad man presents to Him He doth not receive. A good man's prayers, his alms, his fasting, God receives; the like services from him who in his heart departeth from the Lord, a bad man's prayers, in such sense as they can be called prayers, his alms, his fasting, the Almighty God receiveth not. The service which is offered to God in lieu of a good life God receives not. Abel's offering He received, Cain's He did not receive; the one man being holy in life, the other not holy. And this reason of the difference between the Almighty's regard to the one and to the other is distinctly pointed out, as it would seem, in the words of the narrative in the Book of Genesis, where it is said that God had respect, favourable respect, to "Abel and his offering," while "to Cain and his offering He had not respect"; first, the person, you see, being accepted or rejected, and then accordingly, and answerably, the offering. This account of the different aspect in which the two brothers' offerings respectively were regarded from on high might seem sufficient, had we no other. But the truth is, we have a further account; the sacred narrative is more particular, and gives us some other circumstances which solicit notice. The two brothers brought different offerings to God, different in kind; Cain brought of the fruits of the earth, Abel brought of his flock, yea of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. Each brought of his possessions, the one of the produce of the earth, the other of his living store, yea in its best form, and poured out its life before God. Now, even yet, it might have seemed not easy for us to say with certainty what circumstances made the one offering more acceptable than the other; or whether, indeed, it was more acceptable in regard of the matter of the offering, or only in regard of the disposition of mind of the offerer. But there is another passage of Holy Scripture which throws great light on this matter. I allude to Hebrews xi., where it is said, verse 4, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." It is here said that there was in the mind of Abel a principle of faith, in making his offering, which in the mind of Cain there was not. Now further: faith is a trust in the word of God; and if Abel offered in faith it must

have been because God had intimated that He would accept such and such an offering ; which intimation from God Abel acted upon, and brought that offering which God had intimated that He approved, while Cain did not act upon it, but consulted merely his own imagination. With regard to Abel's offering, it is not, indeed, said in so many words in the Bible that God Himself appointed this sacrifice of a slain animal to be brought to Him ; but putting the two things together, that Abel's sacrifice, the slain animal, was brought in faith, and was accepted of God, while the other kind of offering, of the fruits of the earth, was not brought in faith, and was not accepted ; considering this, I say, on the one side, and considering on the other hand the reason that appears, a most strong and appropriate reason, why the bleeding victim should have been appointed by God Himself a type and emblem of the great Sacrifice that in due time should be, to take away the sins of the world ; putting these things together, we see the strongest reason for believing that God Almighty Himself appointed that kind of offering which Abel brought, and which Cain was not careful to bring. We are brought, therefore, to this : that in seeking God, and in approaching Him with religious service, the one of the two brothers was careful to follow that method which God Himself prescribed, to walk in the path which God's finger had marked ; the other chose his own way of serving God. Thus early, therefore, were set up in the world two forms of religion ; a religion of God's appointment, and by its side a human system, the suggestion of man's own mind ; and it was seen what was the history of each, the origin of each, and the result of each. In Abel was a reverential mind, observant of God's conditions, and of His will ; and the same disposition of mind which made Abel in other respects a holy man, made him careful also to observe and to follow the will of God in respect of the religious service which he offered Him. In Cain, on the contrary, was a mind not observant of the will of God ; more coarse and hard in all its motions and conduct, no doubt, and therefore in religious as well as other acts, choosing its own way, instead of watching tenderly and scrupulously for the intimations of God's will. I suppose there will always be persons of this character of mind, calling themselves independent and the like ; finding a satisfaction in saying they will do as they like : but some persons like to feel at every turn God's guiding hand ; like, God having taught them to like, the watching for intimations, yea, though slight and obscure, of God's mind and will ; they are not less free than the others, or less independent. A loyal man, loyal to his sovereign, loyal by preference, is not less free and independent than the noisy, troublesome talker who resists authority as much as he can. The Angels in Heaven are quite free ; they do that which they love best to do, viz., serve and obey God Most High, and their worship is surely an orderly worship. The soldiers of a well-ordered army do not feel it a painful constraint that they move by one plan ; order is not slavery : on the contrary, there is no worse slavery than that of disorder. We in England love freedom, and long may we do so, true freedom is a part of our happiness, it is the air we must breathe ; but, perhaps, as every national character has its dangers, our danger may be a certain restless desire to be reminding ourselves of our freedom, and fearing whether our armour does not fit us rather too tight. One thing is certain ; in the narrative before us, the story of Cain and Abel, it is the younger brother who appears to advantage, the one who did not choose his own religion, but looked upward for guidance even in the details of his service. Another consideration may here come in, the influence, viz., that our conduct may have upon others. There are those who care not much for such considerations ; the story before us has an instance, " Am I my brother's keeper ? " said one : but he is not favourably brought before us who so spake : it was Cain, who having done harm, then said he was not answerable for what befel his brother. Yes, every one of us is answerable for his brother's welfare as far as he can affect it, one way or the other ; and a religious man will feel this more than any other, because in thinking of his brother's welfare he thinks of it in regard to his spiritual, i.e., his eternal, interests.

Once more, what was the great difference between the two brothers' offerings in respect of the kind and matter of the offering ? The one brought of the produce of the earth, the other a victim to bleed on the altar. The one of the earth's fruits, as acknowledging all to be from God ; and there the meaning of the oblation seemingly ended. The other offered a lamb, a life, as if confessing his own life to be forfeit on account of transgressions, and seeking of Divine mercy to accept the life of the harmless animal instead. We cannot but see in Abel's offering, Abel's sacrifice, a confession of sin, of transgression, of guilt. Great is the interest imparted to the whole subject at once by this consideration

added. The service which pleased God—which found acceptance with Him—was that which expressed a sense of sin on the part of the worshipper; acknowledging the life to be forfeited for sin, and spared by mercy. I find an interest in observing that the Evangelical religion was the more careful in its acts of worship, the more scrupulous in watching for the intimations of God's will. In these times we hear persons saying sometimes that a heart-worship is the all-important thing, and the particulars of service less a matter of moment. Observe on the contrary the two brothers in the case before us: the Evangelical worshipper, the more careful and scrupulous as to what he brought, more reverent and exact to observe the intimations of God's will; the other bringing what it occurred to him to bring. This, I think, deserves notice. But the all-important difference between the two oblations was this, that the one spake of Christ, the other not. The bleeding lamb spake of the blood that should be shed for us, to wash out our sins. With what measure of clearness the worshipper himself, in that early age, foresaw the coming Saviour, I venture not to say; the Scripture does not tell us this matter precisely; but the Scripture does say Abel brought his offering in faith, while his brother did not. Abel brought in faith; in much dimness of knowledge, perhaps, but in faith, in real faith; committing himself to God and God's promises, in simple reliance; and that is the temper of mind which God loves, even where it is attended with scanty measure of knowledge. What is the parallel case to this now? I think I can discern one: a humble believer of scanty education, but much earnestness and simplicity of character, coming to the Holy Sacrament—to that precious commemoration of the Sacrifice once offered for sin. If Abel's knowledge was scanty because in that early age the Saviour had been but dimly foreshewn, so there are those now whose knowledge is scanty because they have not been in the way of instruction, in any considerable measure. Shall they for that reason stay away from the holy table? shall they not press forward to touch the hem of the garment because they have no clear notion as to how virtue and healing can flow to them through that touch? Shall they think so hardly of the Saviour as to suppose He reserves His benefits for those who had great advantages, such as they have had no means of obtaining? No, they have not so learned Christ; they know not much of many subjects, but they know enough of Him to encourage them in drawing near. They know He came to preach the Gospel to the poor, and the poor cannot be a learned race. They know He once noticed a poor woman favourably, yea, and who had not in former time lived an honest life, but who now was a true penitent; and Jesus spoke very kindly of her, and accepted her service when she washed His feet, and kissed them, and wiped them with her hair, "because she loved much." If such be the rule, says the humble and earnest believer, I trust the call is to me. I cannot do much for my Saviour, but I can, He kindling my heart, love much; I can weep for the sins which made Him bleed, can hate them, and leave them off by His help and in His strength. I can hear His words and understand them, that He came to save sinners. I hear the voice speaking as to me, I look up, His eye is on me; who says I must doubt and distrust Him? distrusting myself, but trusting Him, I draw near; He provides the wedding-garment, and I am fed.

Enoch

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"Enoch walked with God," etc.—Genesis v. 24.

In the first 1500 years of the world's history, between Adam and the Flood, preserved to us only in the marvellous pages of the Book of Genesis, there is one name which stands apart with a living interest. It is that of a man whose father is utterly unknown, save by name and age, and whose son was the longest liver on record. His own biography consists of four verses, and his years are less than half those which many of his contemporaries lived. His father lived to mourn long after he departed. Even his grandfather survived him many years. But this short life, as it was then accounted, was the best of all. Perhaps there never has been so pure a human life; perhaps never so rare a character. The name, significant like most Scripture names, seems to point to dedication by means of sacrifice, derivatives from the same root being applied to the dedication of the altar, the dedication of a house, and the dedication of the Temple. It

may not, therefore, be a mere fancy to suppose that by some well known act of sacrifice Enoch became a dedicated man.

His life divides itself, like that of many men in history, into two parts. For the first sixty-five years it is merely said that he "lived." During that period he married a wife, who is unknown to us, even by name, and had one son. All his days of infancy, boyhood, and early manhood, are covered, silently, by that one word. He did nothing more that is of any consequence to know. Like most of us, he spent those years, leaving behind no trace upon the world, save in his son. After the lapse of the centuries since, which dwarf all human achievements, it is not wonderful to find it so. Apparently those were years of ordinary life, with its occupations and temptations. Tradition says he was a shoemaker; and the want of anything in the story to suggest so unromantic and so poor a calling makes it the less likely to be a fabrication of later days. I should not be sorry to think it true. God has always been willing to choose the poor. With the remembrance of Nazareth, I feel no shock in speaking of the "shoemaker" of patriarchal times. The point of the whole is that here was a man, both "of like passion," and of like humble occupation, with ourselves; a veritable man, not of the cloister or the wilderness, no celibate, no dreamer of dreams, no recluse; a man, not of porcelain, but of clay.

So passed, without further notice, the period of active youth and early manhood. There is nothing to tell. But, then—something happened! We infer it from the total change of language, which carries its own explanation. The writer who tells us that for sixty-five years he "lived," adds that he "walked with God after he begat Methuselah"; and that he continued to walk with Him for "three hundred years," "and begat sons and daughters." There is no mistaking the purport of such words. They indicate a change in the life and the character of the man; and they tell us when it commenced. Of course, after the manner of Scripture, much is left unsaid, with the effect of permitting most of us to find that the pattern life of the text has its application to ourselves. It is not told us whether the change which then took place was that which we call "conversion"; or whether it was some striking crisis in a life already given to God, which made it a holy one. Either supposition is consistent with the language; either is fruitful in lessons; but the former is perhaps the more natural—that then the great change took place in this man's heart which the Apostle John calls the passing from death to life; and that it brought with it a change in the whole domain of his outward work and being.

The Epistle to the Hebrews traces the change to "faith," and this word is equally applicable to the first step, and to those which follow it. The passage in either case shows us that Enoch was a forgiven man, and that he was forgiven through the Blood of the Sacrifice that was in due time to be offered up on Calvary. At all events he began as we all must begin. The crisis of pardon, when we come to know our need of it, to feel that this must be the starting-point; that there is no life without birth, that we must be "born again" before we can do anything, that the first step must go before the second, that there is no possibility of getting anything out of a dead soul—that is the crisis of a soul for time and eternity.

And that took place with Enoch, if not before, then at the age of sixty-five. It is after this turning-point that the "walk" begins of which the Bible speaks to us. "He walked with God." Familiar acquaintance with the words tends to hide from us the singular force and expressiveness of the language employed. To walk is the commonest of things for every man. It is the habitual method of passing on amid our daily duties. It is the custom, not so much of the rich man—though even he cannot dispense with it, save on rare and formal occasions—but of the poor man, who can move about in no other way. It is a series of small, short, unimportant steps, which together make up the sum of our journeys. It is an action which continually impiles progress, and excludes the idea of standing still anywhere.

Now, this is an expressive description of life, whatever be its character: it is a daily walk. But in the case of Enoch it is a description of his life before God. The spiritual life of the man is indicated by it. It was a humble life, as where, in that remarkable passage of the Prophet Micah, we are told that God's "requirement" of a man is that he should "humble himself to walk with God." It does not need great elevation of heart to enable a man to do that, but great humiliation of spirit.

It was the daily and hourly habit of life with Enoch, not kept for great events and specially serious times, nor for the hours of worship, but maintained throughout the even, continuous tenor of life—always so. It was exercised in the small and slight

occurrences which pass in a man's day; sometimes within the circle of home, with its trials or its joys; sometimes in the concerns and labours of the toil that lies without; in the patient bearing of contradiction; in the brave facing of danger; in the toil of weary hours, when the heart is sick and the head is heavy; in face of the contention of the rival, the reproach of the foolish, the wonder of the selfish. It was thus he maintained his walk. And in it all he seemed to find this life easier the longer that he lived it. The first year was the hardest, and the last the sweetest. He never stood still, any more than did the world which carried him. Nor did he go back on that straight course on which he had set out. But, always accomplishing some new purpose, achieving some new work, making some new conquest over himself, reducing the impossible to the actual, and then finding it easy. Thus Enoch walked, every step bringing him nearer to the great consummation.

In all this, however, I have not mentioned that which was the crown of life, as rare as it was beautiful. His life was a "walk with God." What does it imply? Agreement. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" "Let this mind be in you, which was also in"—God. To agree about everything in daily life; in what we lose, and in what we gain; in what is wanting, and in what is possessed; in the poverty which pinches us, and the riches which make us strong; in the sickness which lays us aside, and the health which sustains—in all such things to be of the same mind with God. Enoch was, else he would have stood still, or gone back, or turned aside.

It meant submission. A decision was needed at almost every step. What road to take? How long each day's journey? At what rate was it to be—when fast, when slow? And when to pause? Who decides such questions for us? Have we any choice at all? Is it matter of arrangement between us and Another? Or do we resign the whole into the hands of God? Only in so doing can we walk with Him, for every step involves it. And so Enoch did.

It meant fellowship. It could not be a silent walk, much less a sullen one. Everything suggested conversation, and that meant communion. Every turn in the road led to some remark. The road was familiar to God, but it was new to Enoch; and there would be many a question, and many an explanation. There would be times of weariness and pain, which would give rise to talk about such things too. There would be points of observation, where far stretches of view would be visible, both over the past and the future, and these would be spoken of, and something of them would be revealed; life, in its mysteries of beginning and end; and death, which had been to all, and was to be for most, but not for all. So Enoch walked, and talked, with God.

There was the continual presence of God in that lifelong walk. He was never away, nor was He ever supposed to be. Did the conscience of that Presence leave Enoch, the whole day would be changed. But even as when we go forth in the sunshine, and are ever conscious that it is there, without needing to pause and say so; even as the mind recognizes it as the companion of our journey, without the need of framing a definite thought about it, so would Enoch know, feel, be sure of, the presence of God, because he continually saw Him. All the more, too, because a life so spent must be a lonely one; human companionship failing us because it cannot go with Him. To be separated unto God means inevitably being separated from those to whom God is not welcome. To others the soul must often say, as the Lord said, "Ye shall leave Me alone," adding, "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with Me." So the company of God is solitude in the world, and when we walk with Him others will not walk with us. But Enoch, though left much alone, was always in the presence of God.

No wonder, then, that he had messages to deliver, things to say which God had said to him, and things which God meant him to tell. He had, and he told them: though, strange to say, we learn this, not from the ancient history which records his life, but from one of the last books in the Bible (Jude, verses 14, 15), as if men were not able to bear the knowledge till revelation were nearly complete; and the Church had to gain much experience in God's dealings with men, ere it could listen to the rejected message of Enoch. For he, too, as he walked, was a prophet; and before Noah's day he warned the men, whose folly and shame he saw around him, of their sin and its consequences. He saw them foaming like a raging sea, and forewarned them of that dark and rocky shore on which they must break. For the Lord,—the Lord by Whose side he was walking,—the Lord would come, bringing His saints with Him, the "ten thousands" who minister and rejoice before Him; and when He came, He must take vengeance. His very presence is vengeance to the evil, whether it be in flood or fire.

Enoch prophesied : but the man who in solitude walked with God was not listened to : he was a man of visions and dreams ; he was no practical man of the world. The ungodly sinners spoke against him, but he only drew the nearer unto God.

Still he held fast. "He standeth by faith." "The task of continuing" (says one) "is harder than that of beginning." To retain this high position is harder than to take it. Yet blows and trouble, opposition and reproach, force us often to take refuge in the only place where they harm not,—at the side of God. Walk on, holy Enoch ! walk on, and fear not ! for there is at hand a testimony, which only now comes, after a great part of the journey is over, and when the end is not distant. "He had this testimony, that he pleased God." This could be none other than the voice of God Himself ; the voice which he well knew, and which he often heard ; but which on this occasion, so memorable as to be recorded more than three thousand years afterwards, and to be familiarly spoken of now, when nearly five thousand years have passed, was specially a witness of God Himself to Enoch's soul. And it said, "Thou art pleasing to God." Many a word of God has been spoken to many a soul on earth ; but only one other has been heard at all like this,—“This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”

How much is involved in the fact ! How solitary the position of Enoch ! To no other mere man,—not to the martyr Stephen ; not to the Baptist John ; not to the man of Patmos ; not to the brother of the Lord : only to Enoch in part, as to Jesus in full, did the voice of the Father speak of being "pleased"—the Father, Who had so long been "walking" with His son on earth.

Long ! And yet the time seemed short to those who spent lives like those of "a tree" (Isa. lxxv. 22). Father and grandfather, two elder generations, looked upon this strange descendant as but a youth, or at least not as an old man. And a day came,—and an evening fell,—when to the home and family Enoch did not return. He had been seen at his usual employment not long before. Child, or friend, or neighbour had spoken, and had but little answer : for his eye seemed to look into a far distance, and his mind to be elsewhere engaged. Upon his face there was a look, which had not been seen, there or elsewhere, before : a look, which reminded the beholder of that strange, calm beauty which lies upon the face of the dead ; where all the lines of age are smoothed away, and a sweetness, hitherto hidden, is revealed.

Where was Enoch ? They sought him in his usual haunts, and in his places of retirement : where he wrought his daily labour, and in his closet of prayer where he was wont to shut himself in ; in the lonely glen, and by the river side ; in the houses of friends, and in distant resorts where he had prophesied of God. They sought : but he "was not found." "Some evil beast hath devoured him," said some. "He hath fallen into some pit," cried others. "The waters have carried him away," said others still. Yet no tidings came. No grave was dug, no monument erected, no mourning worn for him. Even the tear was checked. For this came to be known—how, there is no record—but it was known, and whispered, with bated breath, and solemn countenance : Enoch did not die ! Enoch was translated ! Enoch went above with God ! Enoch walked on, up, through the clouds, beyond the sky, glorious, beautiful, immortal, side by side with God ! "He was not : for God took him."

One or two such men in all history ! But whereas the second was "seen" when he departed with the chariot of fire that waited, and in which he was "taken up" by the whirlwind, nothing is said of Enoch's departure. Only that somewhere, as God and he walked together, a door opened, and they both went in.

Enoch

BY REV. WILLIAM BATHGATE, D.D.

"*Enoch walked with God,*" etc.—*Genesis v. 24.*

How simple yet how sublime this description, or rather definition, of a godly life, "Enoch walked with God." You see the venerable man, not, I think, musing on some mountain top, far above all earthly human cares, living a species of super-celestial life, void of the anxiety and sympathies common to humanity. Not thus would I read the life of Enoch. I see Enoch the father among his sons and daughters,

solicitous about their upbringing, grieved when any of them do ill, his heart bowed down to the dust when any of them fall, his heart rising to Heaven in calm yet jubilant gladness, when any of them do credit to their father and to their father's God. I see Enoch among his neighbours, speaking words of sympathy to the afflicted, doing acts of kindness to the poor, doing deeds of righteousness in the market, discharging all the duties of daily life like a man, like a father, like a neighbour, like a brother. And yet he walks with God all the while. He walks as seeing the Invisible One, he walks like a child talking to his Heavenly Father, the presence of God ever penetrates him. Enoch thinks and feels, speaks and acts, rejoices and sorrows, as "seeing Him Who is invisible."

I. OBSERVE WHAT CONSTITUTES WALKING WITH GOD.

You must not think of this kind of life as something of an entirely unearthly order. It is most certainly something different from the earthly, worldly life so common all around. But I deprecate exceedingly all those descriptions of godliness or of walking with God, which set forth saints as so absorbed in communion with the things of Heaven as to have almost no communion with the things of earth, as so absorbed in communion with God as to have almost no communion with the world. Alas! we have ten thousand times too much carnality and worldliness in the Church, and I would not attempt to furnish any one with an apology for grasping modes of doing business, or for niggardly modes of keeping money. But the spirit of worldliness will never be cast out of us by dreamers who describe walking with God as a life lived on earth, and among men, by a man who somehow or other eliminates all that is temporary and human from his heart and conduct. The thing is unbelievable and undesirable. Walking with God is something much more godlike. A sentimental life such as is spoken of frequently as the Christian walk, would not be godlike, while it is thought to be pre-eminently so. But what is walking with God? You remember the question, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" A man cannot walk with his neighbour except they be agreed. A man cannot walk with God except they be agreed. So in fact, agreement, harmony of thoughts and principles and conduct, is walking with God.

We must not, as we are apt to do, confine the term "walking" to external conduct. The understanding may walk with God, may live to God in entertaining and pursuing thoughts like the thoughts of God on any given subject. The heart may walk with God, may burn for God, in cherishing those affections which God kindles, and which He desires to see rising to Himself and flaming out to others. The conscience may walk with God, may point to God in holding up to itself that standard of justice which God approves. The whole inner man may be walking with God, when there is little opportunity of performing external acts, either of mercy or righteousness. Indeed there can be no external walk with God unless that spring from an internal walk with God. There may seem to be a walk with God in act, where there is none in thought and feeling; but there must be internal harmony before there is external reality.

This is walking with God—to look through the light of the love of God in Christ, into His face and see the sunshine of forgiveness upon it, and to say, "My Father, my forgiving Father!" This is walking with God—to see how He loves the souls of men, of all men, and to feel stirring within us compassion like the compassion of God. This is walking with God—to put forth honest, earnest efforts to teach men the way of salvation. This is walking with God—to cherish in our heart of hearts desires like the desires of God, and to pray unceasingly that these desires may be accomplished. This is walking with God—to do our duty to one another in daily life, fearing God, and doing what is right and honourable because God would have us do it. Now, it is practicable for each of us to walk by the side of God, as a forgiven happy child, as a lover not of self, but of our Father and all our brethren, as men inspired by the spirit of integrity,—a proud integrity, that would die rather than stoop to meanness,—as heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. Do you thus walk with God? I have painted no pictures. I have only stated a few plain realities, and yet they may trouble your conscience. Can you say you breathe the atmosphere of God's presence, and is it more than enough to make you follow hard after Him? Often test yourselves by the question, Is this one of God's feelings; is this one of God's principles of action, or laws of conduct? Would I be ashamed of this, if God manifested in the flesh were to appear at my side?

II. OBSERVE TWO OR THREE OF THE MOST POTENT HELPS TOWARDS MAINTAINING A CHRISTIAN WALK WITH GOD.

This walk must be both begun and maintained by "looking unto Jesus." It is in Christ that we see the very God with Whom we must be agreed, with Whom we are to walk. "Looking unto Jesus" must be the chief watchword of him who honestly desires to walk with God. Is not this what the Apostle means when he says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." What inspiring words are these! We must look to Him, we must see Him in the fulness of His Mediatorship, as the complete Christ. He is to be considered, looked into, in more than one of His offices. We are to look unto Him as the Author and Finisher of our faith, as the Lamb of God dying for our sins, and giving us the first truth which reconciles us to God, and the truth which has the perfecting of our faith too. We are to look unto Him as enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and as an example in that respect also, when we are tempted to be wearied, to yield. We are to look unto Him as our "advocate with the Father," as the Saviour Who "ever liveth to make intercession for us," that we may walk steadily with God. "Looking unto Jesus" means much more than looking unto Him on the Cross, though that you must daily do. If you wish to walk with God, consider Jesus not only on the Cross, but in the Heavens, as the Word of God sets Him forth. As you think of Him, you must not deem yourself guilty of fanaticism, should you catch yourself whispering—"Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, Thou makest walking with God pleasant and practicable. O help me to walk humbly and closely with my God!"

There is only another of the helps towards walking with God which I mention, but it is a most potent one. It is looking into Eternity,—*looking into Eternity*. I wish I may be able to make you see and feel what I would fain mean by looking into eternity. St. Paul says that "the inward man" walks more and more steadily with God by looking at "the things eternal." I am sure I see many before me who have felt falling upon them the shadows of that eternal world. It is a solemn feeling. I fear many Christians hardly feel it. Had you ever the suspicion that you might soon cross the awful borders of the unseen state? Or have those of you who are past the meridian ever quietly said to yourselves, "Eight or ten years hence we shall in all probability be in eternity, in worlds altogether new, and the place that knows us now shall no us no more." That is one of the omnipotent convictions. It would make any man behave himself. It is a mighty aid toward walking with God, to walk on the border-line of eternity. It gives dignity to the whole life. It makes a Christian man walk worthy of an eternal destiny when he feels falling upon him the ennobling beams of his very near crown. O, my friends, look into eternity like a man looking into the face of a friend, and you will hold the more firmly the hand of the Master and your Elder Brother, and walk the more constantly with your Heavenly Father. It is a miserable religion,—a spurious, hollow Christianity,—that which makes men apologize for forgetting eternity because time is so absorbing. You might as well apologize for forgetting God because self is so absorbing. All these shallow, shameless excuses are founded upon wrong, wicked views, both of time and eternity, both of God and man. It is full time we had done with them.

III. OBSERVE THE INFLUENCE OF WALKING WITH GOD ON OUR FAMILIES AND NEIGHBOURS.

You naturally ask, How can I help my children, my neighbours, my country, my kind? Many of your efforts may be problematical. Many a generous, brave man dies in the grasp of a great mistake in trying to help the race. If you walk with God your influence will be good, you will neither live nor die under a mistake. Were you some day in the presence of your child to begin to talk with an Angel in Heaven, how your little one would be startled and influenced. You do far more than this, when you talk to and walk with God. Remember, it is a great achievement to lodge in the minds of your children the thought, "Well, there is a God, with Whom my father walks." And there is not only the recognition of the fact, but there is a healthful, bracing, Heavenly atmosphere around the man who walks with God. And then the aroma of the life goes out upon neighbours. Amid the bitter blasts of east winds, and dry, biting atmospheres, it is sweet and refreshing to feel the kindly breeze, the

breeze of a God-loving, man-loving, life of righteousness and compassion. Men of the world think we are speaking romance when we speak of a Christian man blessing a neighbourhood, blessing the world. But one man walking with God scatters around him and leaves behind him the most blessed influences. Would any of you begin this walk with God? Take hold of the hand of Jesus Christ, and look up in His face, and say, "My Redeemer!" and thus begin your walk with God.

Lamech

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"*Lamech.*"—*Genesis v. 28.*

Lamech was the son of Methuselah, and therefore the grandson of Enoch. There was another Lamech, just as there was another Enoch, of the race of *Cain*: in those simple times, when words were few and every name had its meaning, it is not wonderful that the same name should be given to more than one person. Our Lamech was of the race of *Seth*, and must have lived considerably later than the other.

Methuselah had several sons and daughters; but Lamech is the only one mentioned by name. He was the first-born; and it is through him that the genealogy is traced. His father was a hundred and eighty-seven years old at his birth, and lived afterwards seven hundred and eighty-two years. The whole age of Methuselah, the oldest man, was nine hundred and sixty-nine years. The age of his son came far short of this, being only seven hundred and seventy-seven years. The great age of the men before the flood surprises us: but only because it is so different from the length of life in after-times. It is plainly stated in Scripture, and is to be simply believed; and even to our understanding, there are reasons which may account for the difference.

In the course of so long a life, much must have happened to Lamech, but almost the only event recorded is the birth of his son Noah. Those are the main events in our lives, which most concern God's purposes and His dealings with mankind. Lamech, like Methuselah, had other children, but their names are not mentioned. It was Noah who was to be God's chosen instrument in a great and awful change, and through whom the race of man was to be preserved. The greatness of the son gives a greatness to the father. By far the most important event in the life of Lamech was the birth of Noah.

Lamech was a hundred and eighty-two years old when this son was born to him. He called him by a name which till then (so far as we are told) had been given to none, and which we find borne by only person afterwards, and that a woman, one of the daughters of Zelophehad. The meaning of the word Noah is *rest*, or *refreshment*, or *comfort*; and that meaning was in the mind of Lamech when he gave the name. In many cases of Scripture names, we have to gather from the name itself the motive with which it was given; but here the father's mind and purpose are plainly told, and his very words have come down to us: "He called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

These words are words of faith and hope, and seem to have somewhat even of a prophetic spirit. Some have supposed them to show an expectation that Noah should be the promised seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head; but there is no warrant for this, and the words themselves plainly point to something else. For the sin of Adam, God had pronounced a curse upon the *ground*. It was still to produce food for man, but by man's labour alone. Thorns and thistles were to be its natural growth, and it was only by continual tillage that man was to cause it to yield him bread: "in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Lamech's words were words of faith, but faith with regard to this particular point, "the work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

Nine generations of men had lived since the curse was pronounced—comprising a time of about a thousand years. Generation after generation had toiled; and it is not to be supposed that in the course of that time the art of tilling the ground had greatly improved, or the labour become materially less. Though cattle were now kept,

and iron was made use of, yet the implements were doubtless still rude, and the toil consequently hard and painful. The words of Lamech plainly express a painful burden of labour. How was his new-born son to comfort him and others under this burden?

Partly by lightening the labour itself. In so ancient and scanty a history every word is of importance. A few chapters further on, we find two or three words bearing on the subject. We read of Noah that, after the flood, when he went forth out of the ark, he "began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard." The words translated "a husbandman" are literally "a man of the ground." Doubtless the translation expresses the true meaning. He was a man of the ground, because he paid peculiar attention to it, and became more skilful than others in tilling it. He turned the ground to a new use, making it bring forth grapes as well as corn. But he could not have planted a vineyard without first preparing the soil. A mere scratching of the surface might have produced a scanty crop of corn, but deeper digging was needed for the grape-vine. All men then were husbandmen, or men of the ground, as having to labour on it; but Noah was so peculiarly, because he tilled it better and more easily. If he must dig and plough deeper for his vines, doubtless he did so for his wheat also. Thus he lightened labour, and increased the produce. He was an improver of agriculture—the first we read of. What made his father foresee this in him, we cannot be sure. But, without some intimation from God, it is difficult to account for it. We have here more than a hope; these words were prophetic.

It is interesting to connect the words of Lamech about his son, the vineyard-planter, "this same shall *comfort* us," with what is said of wine—"and wine that maketh glad the heart of man." Though Noah himself, through ignorance probably, drank of his wine to excess, yet is there not a *proper* use of it? In that verse of the psalm, wine and oil and bread are spoken of together as all produced for man by the bounty of God, each having its own use: if oil and bread then may be rightly used, may not wine also? Because many abuse this gift (and not *this* gift only), is the moderate and proper use of it unlawful? If there be any true connexion here, we seem to find in it some sanction for the temperate use of wine as a refreshment after labour.

But, whether this be so or not, a great honour is here done to the work of those who till the ground. By far the greater number of our population are engaged on the land. Trade employs many, mechanics many, and manufactures many, while some can live without working at all; but all these classes together are outnumbered by the agricultural population, the *men of the ground*. They form a most important class, and most honourable. No one need be ashamed of being a husbandman, or tiller of the ground. They who excel in the work—a good ploughman for instance—come in for a part of the praise which Lamech gave beforehand to his son. And those who lighten labour, and improve tillage, by inventing better tools and finding out new ways, so as to make the ground more productive—these also are the means of comfort and good to others, and so are deserving of honour. Husbandry, in its rudest form, was the first employment of man; and still, in its improved methods, it is as useful and honourable as any.

It reminds us, it is true, of the *fall* of man; for labour was part of the condemnation. But it speaks to us also of mercy mixed with judgment, and encourages us to labour in hope. For man's disobedience the ground was cursed, but not utterly. It was not made barren, so that the race of men must pine and die for lack of sustenance. The power by which the earth makes seed to grow and fruits to ripen, that mysterious power given to the ground by God, was not withdrawn. The earth should still bring forth food for man; only, not without man's labour. God would feed mankind; but men must use the appointed means. We hear the voice of mercy as well as of judgment in the words, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Here is a promise, as well as a sentence. "Thou shalt eat bread"—I will not suffer thee to want, I will feed thee; this is the promise. "In the sweat of thy face," is the condition added because of man's sin. It is the tiller of the ground who is God's special instrument in the fulfilment of this promise; in the sweat of his face, others as well as himself eat bread; his constant and various labour is employed in carrying out God's merciful provision. When Lamech gave this name to his son, and spoke these words, he showed faith in God's word. Noah should comfort his own father, and many besides, by diligently and skilfully tilling the ground. God's blessing was

promised to the work; and Lamech believed that it would be specially given in the case of his son.

In these ancient words we find set forth also the duty of children to parents. "This same shall comfort us." Children are given to parents for comfort and help. True, the duty is two-sided. The duty of parents comes first. It rests with them to provide for their children's wants, while still children. The father works for his children's bread; the mother is busy for them, early and late. In their early years children are dependent on their parents. But, in course of time, things are changed. The parents have become weak, while the children have grown strong. Now arises a new duty for children—to comfort and help their parents, to provide for their wants, to work for them. Shall an aged father or mother go to the Union, while able-bodied sons and daughters have it in their power to maintain them? Shall parents be without such comforts as old age needs, while children can supply them? "This same shall comfort us": the words seem to stand out distinctly, as showing, not merely what Lamech hoped for from his son, but what God expects from all sons and daughters towards their parents.

This however is not the only comfort which parents may expect from their children. A far higher sort is spoken of in the Proverbs,—“A wise son maketh a glad father.” This does not mean a learned son, or one merely prudent and steady; but a godly son, wise with Heavenly wisdom. We know what the son of Lamech became. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” With Noah God established His covenant. He believed and obeyed; “according to all that God commanded him, so did he.” For many years he lived a life of faith and holiness in the sight of an evil world; a preacher of righteousness to the ungodly. When the world perished, he and his alone were saved. For nearly six hundred years after the birth of this son, through all the years while Noah preached and the Ark was building, almost up to the Flood itself, Lamech still lived. His words were fully made good; such a son did indeed comfort him. His labour was lightened, his wants were supplied; but that was little. His heart also was cheered; this wise son made Lamech a glad father; rightly was he named *Noah*—rest, or comfort; he who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” this man who “walked with God,” was doubtless a dutiful and loving son, the joy of his father's heart, his stay and comfort to the end of his days.

Such would God have all children to be to their parents. “This same shall comfort us”: so may the godly father or mother pray, hope, and expect, when God bestows a child. “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is His reward.” God intends this gift to be a blessing, not a curse; a comfort, not a heaviness. Let children lay this to heart. And let parents, from the very first, train up their children for God, and continually seek for them His grace and blessing. This is the surest way of finding the words fulfilled, “This same shall comfort us.”

The great event with which the name of Noah is connected is the Flood. Had the words of Lamech any reference to that? It is difficult to trace any. Enoch prophesied of the Lord coming to judgment: and some have thought that this meant the judgment of the Flood, and that the prophecy of Enoch was the curse—afterwards fulfilled in the Flood—under which Noah was to be a comforter. But this seems a far-fetched and groundless idea. “This same shall comfort us” expresses a comfort coming to Lamech personally, and he did not live to see the Flood. Besides, it seems impossible to identify Enoch's prophecy with the curse pronounced by God upon the ground. The only such curse was that pronounced immediately after the fall; for the sentence somewhat like it, which was passed upon Cain, was pronounced against him personally, not against the earth. “And now thou art cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand: when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength.” Cain, it appears, was not to have a full share even in the promise contained in the words, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread”—the very promise which Lamech believed his son would be the means of bringing to pass.

But though we must confine his words to that one cursing of the ground which followed the sin of Adam, yet we see in them a principle of faith of far wider reach. Lamech saw that, when God pronounced the ground cursed, there was mercy mixed with judgment. He recognised God in this infliction—the God of judgment, but the God of compassion and love too. His hope was founded on this character of God.

No son of his could ever have comforted him, unless the Lord God Almighty had tempered justice with loving-kindness, and given hope even while pronouncing sentence.

Thus it always is. We have not yet, in the dealings of God, arrived at the awful point of final judgment. In mercy and long-suffering the Lord delayeth His coming; not yet has that awful sentence been passed, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," the sentence to hopeless woe. God, in His present dealings with men, remembers mercy, gives space to repent, and leaves room for hope. A thousand things in our present condition teach us this. Where is that lot, so forlorn as to show no touch of the hand of divine compassion? Where is that person—however great may have been his transgressions, and how sore soever may be his chastisement—who may not see, if he will, some token of forbearance and kindness, something that still gives ground for hope? "This same shall comfort us." So spoke Lamech in faith, recognizing God's gracious provision for comfort, even while suffering under his righteous sentence for sin. The goodness of God leadeth men—is leading them, is meant to lead them—to repentance. But numbers are blindly ignorant of this, and so disregard and despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, and remain still hard and impenitent. Yet is there comfort and hope even for the lowest and worst. For God is the God of hope, and the God of all comfort. For Christ's sake, He will show Himself such to all who seek Him.

The very word *Curse*, in all its forms, and whether used by God or by man, is an unhappy word, and a word of fear; for it expresses displeasure, and foreshows evil to come. Thus the sentence, "Cursed is the ground for they sake," is an awful sentence; and such it was felt by Lamech, even while he hoped for comfort. But, though the word is the same, yet the curse of God and the curse of man are quite different. God has a right to curse, but man has none. The curse of God is the declaration of His righteous displeasure; the curse of man is the utterance of a wicked hate. God, when He curses, declares what already is, or threatens what shall be; wish, but happily an impotent wish, for man cannot execute the curse which he has no right to speak. Again, there is no mercy in man's curse, no pity, no forbearance; but now, in this present day of grace, God, though He declares His righteous anger, and sets forth the doom of the impenitent, yet keeps back the stroke from falling, and still gives time. It may be that, by His grace, the very terrors of the Lord may persuade men.

Though Lamech was a man of faith, there is no sign that his faith looked beyond such comfort as God would give by means of the son who was born to him. But *we* know of a better comforter than Noah. The son of Lamech was to comfort men with regard to the ground which the Lord had cursed; but Christ is the true Deliverer, taking away the curse itself, and restoring us to full blessing and favour. "This same shall comfort us": thus may every believer say with regard to all the ills of this life. "This same shall comfort us"—the promised Deliverer, Who was to bruise the serpent's head. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Even to the believer the fruits of the fall still remain; still must he toil, and still in the sweat of his face must he eat bread: but from him the curse is removed, and with it the bitterest fruits of the fall; labour is sweetened by hope and trust; and pardon and peace by Jesus Christ, and the sure prospect of rest and glory with Him, make the believer's lot even here a happy lot.

Nor is this all. There is "another Comforter." While yet we wait for our Lord's appearing, while we are still in a world of toil and trial and temptation, "this same shall comfort us"—the Holy Spirit, the promised Comforter. Let us seek and cherish His presence.

Noah

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"He called his name Noah," etc.—Genesis v. 29.

After the death of Abel mankind multiplied, cities were built, the arts increased, iniquity abounded and God was forgotten; and then we see one man amidst the

universal corruption, building an ark, and in so doing set at nought and mocked. This was Noah, and we may now inquire what was the character of one so pre-eminent.

The first point which strikes us in Noah is his extreme solitude, he stands alone in a fallen world; when the great wickedness is described, it is added, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," the one and only one; and again, "The Lord said unto Noah, thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation." It is for this that he stands out so remarkable beyond all the Saints in Scripture, that it was amidst the utter corruption of that generation. He stands alone, like one solitary pillar in the midst of a ruin. But this is not all, for his character is given yet more particularly, "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." This remarkable and beautiful expression that he "walked with God," had been used of Enoch before God took him. Moreover the righteous of Noah and his consequent power with God is shown by the mention of him in Ezekiel, "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God." Now as Job was remarkable for intercession, interceding first of all "continually" for his sons; and then afterwards by the express command of God for his three friends; and as Daniel is known as the signal intercessor with God for his people; so we may conclude from Noah's being mentioned thus together with them that he was especially known of God for his intercessions in behalf of that wicked world in which he lived. And as such prayers are certain in some way to be answered of God, it is probable, that to these, his prayers, his own family were given him, to be the origin of a new world, and in whom the covenant of God might stand.

In addition to these there is also another circumstance which we know of Noah; he is mentioned by St. Peter as "a preacher of righteousness." This description taken with all the rest has great weight; for it indicates that he was not only, like Samuel and Daniel, engaged in mourning and praying for others, not a silent sufferer only as Abel; but that like the Prophets and Apostles he pleaded with them, preaching righteousness. And this might have been during the hundred and twenty years wherein God gave warning of what He was about to do, as St. Peter says, "When once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." Or it might have been all his life before that time; until at last when his preaching had been long in vain, that sign was given, when, "being warned of God, moved with fear, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world." All these things serve to indicate what the life and character of Noah was.

But it is on his Name,—the signification of it, and the emphatic mention of it in Scripture, as given by prophetic inspiration when he was born, that I would most dwell. And his father Lamech, it is said, "called his name Noah," i.e., "rest," or "comfort," saying, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Scripture then, by this account, draws our attention to the "rest" and "comfort" which Noah imports amidst the troubles of the world. The words seem to imply some great alleviation from the evils of the fall. But yet if we look to the mere surface of the history, it is, as St. Ambrose observes, rather the contrary, for in his time wickedness advanced to such an accumulation and height of misery as to bring down the destruction of the world. To this point I would more especially turn, not only because the mention of it in Genesis seems to draw attention to that circumstance, but also because our Lord Himself has in so memorable and marked a manner mentioned Noah and his days as the sign of the days of the Son of Man; and it has always been observed in the Church that the history of Noah is quite full of type and prophecy respecting the Church of Christ in the latter days. Indeed even among the tombs of the early martyrs unto this day some of the most frequent emblems of the Christian faith are taken from Noah and the ark, and the dove. And that the very name of rest and comfort, in its fuller acceptation, signifies Christ, is obvious unto all. Woe unto him who looks to any one else for his comfort and rest.

Thus Noah seems to imply that there will be a "man" in Whom there will be rest and comfort in a perishing world. "And a man shall be," as the Prophet Isaiah says, "an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." In the first ages of the world there was a strong expectation that the great Deliverer was already come or coming; and in answer to this expectation men were given to be signs of Him. Four persons especially stand forth in the old world as it were the pillars of

it on account of this faith; as Abel is the sign of Christ's Death; Seth of His Resurrection; Enoch of His Ascension; so Noah sets forth the rest and comfort which is to be found in Christ in the latter days when "iniquity shall abound." He is the depository of the promise, as God says to him, "With thee will I establish My covenant." Of him Christ shall be born; and St. Paul designates him as the "heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Thus Noah stood alone in the world as it were the Second Adam, the New Man, the type of Him in Whom alone the Father is well pleased; of Him Who is alone "perfect" before God and "righteous"; of Him Who hath found grace, walking with God, for "God was with him"; of Him Who hath promised to be with His Church unto the end; Who in His ministers and the stewards of His mysteries, is warning and preaching to, and interceding for a fallen world. With Noah the covenant is again renewed; and by an express warrant from God all the creatures are made subject to him. "And the dread of you," it is said, "shall be upon every beast . . . into your hand they are delivered." Thus was he the type of the Second Adam, of Whom it is said in the 8th Psalm, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet; all sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field."

As there were the second tables of stone, the first being broken; a second covenant with man after the fall, when the first in Paradise had been forfeited; a second temple after the first was destroyed; a second people taken into covenant with God when the Jews were rejected; so now there is a second world which has the promise, the first being lost, in token of "the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness"; wherein, as St. John says, "there shall be no more curse." "This same shall comfort us because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

Of this great redemption Noah is the sign, and as it were the second parent, as it is stated in the Evangelical Prophet, "For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me"; and then in explanation it is added, "for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, nor the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." The same is again exhibited to us in a very beautiful and striking figure in the Prophet Ezekiel, which is afterwards renewed in the Revelation of St. John, when Christ is represented as sitting on the Throne of His Kingdom. "Upon the likeness of the Throne," says the Prophet of Chebar, was "as the appearance of a man," and "round about was as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain." St. John says, "and there was a rainbow round about the Throne in sight like unto an emerald." Thus "the faithful witness in Heaven" given to Noah still continues unto the end, because it speaks of the everlasting Gospel. "The bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it," said God, "that I may remember the everlasting covenant."

And hence more particularly in Noah, "the Spirit that beareth witness," sets forth "the Water and the Blood," or the two Sacraments: one in the flood and the ark, as St. Peter says, "The like figure whereunto baptism doth now save us by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ." And the other Sacrament afterwards in the blood at that time so expressly set apart, as so emphatically repeated in the Law: "Be sure that thou eat not the blood, for the blood is the life thereof." "For it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." Thus our Lord Himself said, "For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood dwelleth in Me, and I in him."

Thus strongly then is Christ represented to us in Noah; and these are great matters for our contemplation, when we consider His own awful words, in calling our attention to Noah. For when He Himself says, "as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man," this resemblance in the times should rivet our attention to the resemblance to Himself also. Now a promise of rest and comfort, indicated by the name of Noah, implies great and signal need of comfort and rest, and therefore times of tribulation and trial, not necessarily to all men, but to the good; and this is shown in our Lord's own words, for the rest and comfort in Himself which He promises is to them that are much weighed down and oppressed: "Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The times to which our Lord likens these the latter days are then the days of Noah, that is, the hundred and twenty years of his preaching: these are the days wherein He Himself warns men of coming judgment, wherein, if we so apply the words of St. Peter, "the longsuffering of God waits in the days of the Son of Man,

while the ark of Christ's Church is a preparing, wherein few are saved"; and the point of resemblance which our Lord takes is not the violence of great crimes then in the world; but a general forgetfulness of approaching judgment while mankind are taken up "with the cares and pleasures of this life." "They bought, they sold, they planted and builded, they were marrying, and giving in marriage until the day." They are precisely the same reasons why men would not receive the Gospel, and which have been fulfilled from the time in which He spake even unto this day. For though He likens the Gospel to a feast, and though Noah signifies "rest" and "comfort," and the ark a place of refuge, yet they all, He says, with one consent began to make excuse; and these excuses, He states to be the very same reasons which He mentions in the days of Noah: "I have bought a piece of and, and needs go and see it"; or, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."

Moreover, while all this is going on, this indifference and carelessness respecting the future, we have the same God, the same Jesus Christ, in the Book of Genesis as we have in the Gospels, mourning with infinite tenderness and compassion over mankind. In the former are the wonderful and affecting words, "And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart." This exactly corresponds with what we read in the Gospels of our Lord Himself, as in those His expressions: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" and the like: and in that memorable account that when He saw Jerusalem He wept over it, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings," i. e. foreseeing their danger which they knew not of, "but ye would not"; and in the evangelical parable He calls His Angels together over one sinner that He has rescued, saying, "Rejoice with Me, for I have found the sheep which I had lost."

It is then in such days of great outward worldliness and sensuality, while God is "grieved," and His "Spirit striving" in vain with man, warning him of that Judgment which in the "evil imaginations of his heart" he sets aside and will not consider, that the example of Noah is given us. Now when our Lord tells us that if we come to Him He will give us rest; yet at the same time He teaches us that this coming to Him implies our taking upon us His yoke; and though He adds that that "yoke is easy," and that "burden light," yet in other places He speaks of it as the very Cross itself, which, though His martyrs and saints have indeed found full of joy and comfort, yet to flesh and blood it must be in itself burdensome and grievous. The dove of Noah returned to him because she could find no rest for the sole of her foot elsewhere, and he put forth his hand and received her into the ark with joy; but she had returned to the confinement of the ark instead of that liberty which was abroad in the world; and there is not a soul on earth but has oftentimes occasion to say, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I get me away far off, and remain in the wilderness!" But of these very few indeed are they whose prayers in the Holy Spirit take the wings of the dove,—which though it hath lien among the pots yet is covered with silver wings,—and depart from the world to be with Christ.

And thus if Noah signifies comfort, and the great Comforter now in the world, yet he was one that had taken upon him the yoke of God, he was "a righteous man," "perfect in his generation," "walking with God." In building the ark he was, we are told, "moved with fear," in faith receiving the awful warning "of God of things not seen as yet." The difference between him and the world around him was that he realized, expected, looked to the judgment which God was about to bring; but the world was as it is to this day, in the glass of God's Word, shutting its eyes and ears against warnings of the future. "They did eat, they drank, they married and gave in marriage, till Noah entered the ark, and the flood came." The maxim of the world always is, as it then was, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But the Christian's precept is, "Let us fast and watch, for to-morrow we die, and after death the judgment"; or, in his Master's words, "Take heed that your heart be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day overtake you unawares." "Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is."

To accept in faith and fear the doctrine of a sudden, speedy, and eternal Judgment will fill any one with disquietude, and make him feel his need of rest and comfort; and to such it is that this promise is given. He will feel his need of far other consolations than these which the world supplies from without; and most men have had this impression, and felt this want for a time; as, for instance, when the dead body of a

friend or near relative has been lying before them. For in that case they know the Judgment hath in some sense already overtaken, and that too speedily; and they see it must shortly be so with themselves, and they are moved; and while this impression lasts they seek and find rest in Christ, and comfort in the great Comforter; but when the storm has been stilled, and the waters of that affliction abate, they again, like Noah's dove, leave the ark and, may be, return to it no more.

And now to look more closely at the example of Noah, and consider it in conjunction with the warnings of God; it is evident that a deep and abiding, nay, an overwhelming sense of coming Judgment, under which the Christian is to live, is to affect the heart in the world, and not out of the world; or rather is to have the effect of taking him out of the world while he is in the world. And this is the difficulty, he is to walk with God, i.e., with Christ risen, whilst in the world. For Noah himself, while he "walked with God," yet was engaged in those earthly occupations which it is said in the case of the rest of mankind withdrew their heart from the great hereafter. He married and gave in marriage. He was "a husbandman, and planted." Nay, as he was a "righteous man," this implies that he had dealings with mankind, wherein righteousness or integrity is shown: he bought and sold as other men. It is then in these very same occupations, even in the same field, in the same mill, and the same bed, one shall be taken and the other left, when the separation is made. It depends on the keeping or not keeping of the heart in the same employments: as St. Paul states the same: "Brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; . . . they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; they that buy as though they possessed not; . . . for the fashion of this world passeth away." And thus when the Psalmist speaks of those who "forget God" being "cast into hell," he adds, "but the patient abiding of the meek shall not perish."

It is not then in taking us out of these things, but by taking the heart out of them, that the change is needed: and so far from such avocations being made an excuse for neglecting the Gospel, and its great injunction of watchfulness and prayer, they are the most urgent reason for them. Instead of its being said, "I have bought a yoke of oxen," or the like, "and therefore I cannot come," when God calls, it should be said, "I have bought or sold, and therefore I needs must watch and pray more earnestly, for death is found in such things to all who do not. I am engaged in domestic concerns, and therefore I must watch and pray the more continually, lest I be too much taken up in them, and be found sleeping when the time comes." We daily need bread for the body, because we have earthly work to do; shall we not equally need daily bread for the soul, because we have also Heavenly work to do, and the night cometh when no man can work—that work which if found undone, must be left undone for ever?

Noah

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"Noah was a just man," etc.—Genesis vi. 9.

The sin of Adam had been transmitted down, and reached the ninth generation of his descendants, when it came to such a head, that God determined to punish mankind with a signal judgment. We cannot wonder at so deep and universal corruption, when we consider how many causes led to it. The prodigious length of man's life allowed a rapid progress in all the means of making life agreeable. Nothing was lost by remaining imperfect and undivulged at the death of the inventor. A single life sufficed to mature in one brain, and carry into practical effect what now requires many successions of men, each of which painfully recovers the clue of its predecessor. Thus luxury would advance with gigantic strides; but this enormous length of life, keeping death and judgment at such a distance, would inspire a recklessness of enjoyment of the present hour, of which we may somewhat judge from the conduct of ourselves, whose days are reduced to threescore years and ten. Again, it kept bad examples so long upon earth as to diffuse both far among cotemporaries, and deep into rising generations, their pernicious influence. A man from his prime to his end had the opportunity of corrupting eight successive generations. When we consider how infinitely more powerful, as well as more common, evil example is than good, we cannot be surprised at the melancholy

result which came forth at the end of about 1500 years after the murder of Abel. Bad as times have since been, they have never reached that deep and universal depravity to which the world then attained. And, thanked be God, it never can so attain again, from causes too obvious to enumerate. God, however, for a long time had a remnant reserved to Him. The children of Seth long merited the title of sons of God, and kept aloof from the contagion of the example of the sons of Cain. But even they at last relaxed their strictness, and smitten with the fairness of the daughters of Cain, forgot the cause of the honour and glory of God in the unruliness of their desires. They may possibly have been willing dupes to a notion of drawing over the Cainites by means of their wives and connexions to the cause of godliness, and thus have flattered themselves that their own gratification was God's cause. Alas, it was not the last time that the Tempter had thus deluded and made sport of godly men. The leaven once admitted into the mass of the children of Seth soon leavened the whole. The children of godly men are notorious for going beyond all others in profligacy, if they once begin, and for obvious reasons. Accordingly, the generation sprung from this fatal connexion was distinguished by deeds of violence, by corruption of imagination, by cruelty, rapine, and wickedness, to that degree, that it repented the Lord that He had made men on the earth: all earth was corrupt before God. The giants, or mighty men of oppression, already existing of the race of Cain, were soon matched by a similar brood of monsters of the blood of Seth, and the earth was filled with violence. In the end so universal became the apostasy, that one family only out of the thousands of earth continued faithful to the Lord. In the household of Noah the son of Lamech, and tenth in descent from Adam, the lamp of the light of the Holy Spirit shone as light in a window on a dark night amidst a wide and waste moor. There alone was kept holy the Sabbath of God, thence alone arose the sweet smell of accepted sacrifice, there alone was cherished the lively hope of the promised Redeemer, and there alone was God's holy name reserved for prayer and blessing. Elsewhere it was wantonly uttered in profane swearing, cursing, and blasphemy. As far as the life-giving Spirit was concerned, the world was brought back to the early days of Adam, when himself with Eve and two sons were the only living spirits upon earth. In such a state of things God revealed Himself to Noah, communicated to him His resolution of destroying mankind with the earth, and commanded him to build an ark, giving him notice of the very materials, shape, and dimensions, and telling him that it was by a flood of waters that He intended to destroy all flesh. Meanwhile, in His long-suffering He commissioned him to preach righteousness to mankind, if perchance any would repent and turn unto the Lord. Noah immediately proceeded to obey God's command; for 120 years, the length of a whole generation, he continued building and preaching. The Spirit of Christ was upon him. He bade men forsake their ways, and turn to the hope of their promised Redeemer. He warned them against the security of long life, for that God was already laying the axe to the root. He told them his commission and pointed to his ark, which was daily rising, plank above plank, for proof of the sincerity of his conviction. There was no salvation, he told them, unless they returned to the faith whence they had fallen away, and looked up to Him to Whom Adam had looked for the remission of his sins. Great must have been his sorrow for man, and great his zeal for God's daily insulted honour. How great therefore the earnestness of his preaching! He must have had friends whom he wished to rescue from impending perdition, and whom he besought with tears and prayers to give heed to him, and they would not. Some answered with coldness, some rebuked him for impertinence, some treated him with scoffs and insults, and called him a driveller or a madman. From the old and elderly, whose hearts were less accessible, he turned with better hopes to the young. But here also he met with rebuffs. Youth must then have been even more presumptuous than now: they laughed no doubt at the crazy ark-builder as they called him, and asked him in derision every day, when the world was to end? and thanked him, each morning, in mockery, for the respite of another day.

Meanwhile, his ark began to tower over the whole neighbourhood, provoking the jeers of the beholders. The allotted time for repentance was now fast running out; and perhaps a few did begin to think that there was something serious in the matter. Noah on all occasions, they observed, conducted himself with exceeding wisdom and judgment; and if his was a fit of madness, it was a very long one to persist in. Some converts probably he made, whom death spared from beholding the dreadful sight of perishing parents, and brothers, and friends. But these could have been but few, since we find that at the very last he had not gained over even his own servants. How melancholy

now was the sight when he passed from his own door, and came amongst crowds who he knew would shortly be swept away in awful destruction : when he entered the thronged and noisy city, and knew that very soon would be the noise of overwhelming waters there, and then solitude and silence. Day after day the godly man, vexed in his righteous soul, returned weary and faint with useless, thankless toil, to his spiritual solitude. In vain he endeavoured to extend the vineyard of God's Church beyond his own door : the wild boar immediately assailed the advanced inclosure, and before evening it was rooted up. How continual must have been his struggle ! In the morning he poured out his soul to God, and implored the blessing of some fruit upon the labours of the ministry of the day, and in the evening, mourned before Him the impenitence of his brethren, and cried, " Lord, who hath believed our report ? " At night, his wakeful soul resolved upon the ways and means of the morrow, how and where to find the passage to the heart of this and of that friend ; and then, when in the ensuing day he thought he had struck the true chord, and blessed God for it, before night it ceased to return a sound : or one, whom he had left half convinced, or at least, thinking seriously of what had been said early in the morning, was found to have relapsed into all his carelessness and unbelief when he saw him again at night. There is a certain stage of infatuation of sin in which all warning is thrown away, a judicial blindness, when they that have eyes will not see, and they that have ears will not hear. Yet what preaching could be more powerful than that of Noah's ? He preached by God's especial appointment, under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of Christ, with a conviction of approaching judgment, with a wonderful and conspicuous sign of that conviction, to brethren and friends, for whom he would gladly lay down his life. But no human voice can awaken the dead. In times of general apostasy, the mind is so depraved, so possessed of the notion of its own high powers, so bent upon self-gratification, that it recoils from every appeal made by the meekness and single-mindedness of wisdom and grace. As soon as it catches words hostile to its misnamed peace, it either springs, like the enraged tiger, to destroy its disturber, or draws in its head, and shuts itself up, like the tortoise in his shell. Accordingly, they went on building, and marrying, and being married, before the eyes of Noah, up to the moment that he entered into the ark. Those whom God was sparing the sight of the lamentable catastrophe, He was now gradually removing from earth. Lamech was taken away five years before it happened ; and at last died Methuselah, in the very year of the flood.

Great now must have been the agony of Noah. The day was almost at hand ; earth was speedily going to be the sepulchre of her children. He was taking a final leave, bidding an everlasting farewell to all his kinsmen and friends. They laughed incredulously still. One would think that Noah was going to execution, and not they. Perhaps his heart was cut in twain during these last awful moments by the apostasy of some converts, of some with whose hearts he had joined his heart, whom he had loved with that love which godliness makes so pure, so fervent, so lasting. He was now like one leaving his native land for a far-distant country. Faces that he knew and loved, spots that he delighted in, the very altars of Almighty God, were all about to vanish for ever. Never was such a change as this of Noah's. Even when they have been transplanted to an unpeopled wilderness, earth wears to men substantially the same appearance ; they still feel conscious of the existence of fellow-men, though they see them not, and return to their society is not impossible, and beyond all hope. Noah had nothing of this to look forward to : and had he laid up no treasure beyond this earth, he had been, even if saved, the most miserable of men. He could scarcely have desired exemption from the general wreck. But his treasure was laid up in Heaven. He had laid up his hopes in God's merciful promises of redemption ; and he himself (or one of his sons) was now the only channel of these promises. The future Redeemer was in his loins. On his own life now depended his eternal life.

And now the fatal order came. God appeared unto Noah, and commanded him to enter the ark with his wife, with his three sons and their wives, and with the appointed number selected from every kind of beast and bird. In a long procession by two and two, male abreast of female, the vast and varied company elected to salvation of life, entered the ark. When has the world seen such another procession ? when will it see such another, until the saints elected to everlasting life, shall march to their place of eternal rest, into the Heavenly ark, with their Redeemer at their head ? This took place in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the tenth day of the month. And the Lord shut them in. Here, in awful suspense, the holy family awaited

the dreadful time. Perhaps their procession had moved amid a jeering and insulting crowd, whom God's hand alone prevented from laying violent hands on them; and now, from within their place of seclusion, they could overhear the sounds of wassail and merriment, continued through the night, and raised purposely to a louder key than usual in order that Noah might hear, and learn how little they regarded his warnings. Often too in the day-time, sounds would reach them of a world still noisy and busy; and the scoffs of passengers, or insults of a collected crowd, come to their ears. They threatened perhaps to hew down his ark, and pull him out. But the Lord had shut him in. This note did not last long. At the end of seven days, on the 17th day of the month, the waters of the flood came upon the earth, for all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of Heaven were opened. For awhile, perhaps, they heard screams and shrieks of agony, and the sound of persons scaling the ark for refuge, and of knockings upon it for admission, and of well-known voices crying, "save us, or we perish." Noah could not admit them if he would. The Lord had provided for all this, when He shut him in. But the tremendous sound of rushing waters and the loud battering of the storm upon the roof and sides of the ark, soon drowned these and all other sounds. For forty days and forty nights the rains descended and the flood increased until it bore up the ark. As soon as Noah felt the vessel heave from the ground, and found it afloat, and drifting before the wind, when now the last hold of earth was gone, he no doubt called his family around him in prayer to God, Who was now executing such tremendous judgment upon mankind, and so signal deliverance for themselves. He exhorted them to abide in His ways, he told them that any falling-off after such a display of mercy could hardly be recovered by renewal of His grace: that on them depended now the future relation of mankind to God: they were the salt of the earth, from which every believer was hereafter to draw his savour. He bade them make the most in spiritual meditation of this time of bodily inactivity and seclusion, and assist him in maintaining the Church of God pure and holy, however visibly diminished, under the face of Heaven. By this time famine was consuming what the water had spared, and the miserable remnant was clinging to the summits of the high mountainous districts, as those of Taurus, of Himalaya, of the Alps, of the Andes. The first ridge, the huge belt of North-western Asia, was in the neighbourhood of the ark, when it first began to float. The ark may probably drift near it. It would be reduced to a few jagged peaks scattered among the waters, and hourly sinking one after another in them. From these they may hear the wailings and groans of dying men, the moans and roarings of famishing and affrighted brutes. For many days after earth was almost covered the ark would be assailed with the wild screams and flapping wings of huge birds, seeking a resting-place there. Aals! the world would not die an easy death; many a struggle would it make until the last receptacle of life was gone. Could such frightful agonies of a whole dying world, could such a horrible visitation upon sin be ever erased from the memories of its witnesses, or ever cease to warn them with an awful lesson? And yet all was fruitless upon one of them! At length the last peak was covered, and earth gave her last dying shriek. All now was silent, except those sounds which went forth at the Creation, the rushing wind and roaring water. Chaos had partly resumed his ancient reign, the world had past away, and the Church of God was floating in safety, between earth and Heaven, above its ruins. Around was storm and darkness, but peace and plenteousness were within; there the light of the comfort of the Blessed Spirit was cheering its inmates. Such was the foretaste of that enviable state in which she has since been more than once seen, and gazed upon with admiration and awe: when amid the wreck of empires, the violence of civil commotions, amid affliction and darkness, and death all around her, she has sailed steadily and majestically amid the storm around and the surge below, and carried the holy freight of her saints, whose every hair has been numbered, safe and rejoicing in their salvation. The Lord hath shut them in, and no one shall harm them. And while nations look unto the earth, and behold trouble, and darkness, dimness of anguish, in her is shining the light of the Spirit, in her is dwelling the peace of God which passeth all understanding; the beginning of troubles will indeed ever procure for her mockery and insult, as it did for the ark; but the end of them shall see her resting uninjured and triumphant, and all her mockers swept clean from earth away. In her is the only refuge from a convulsed world; may we in the day of the Lord be found amid her holy family!

By the time that the waters had reached their greatest height, they stood 15 cubits above the loftiest mountains; they prevailed for the space of 150 days. God then

remembered Noah; as Scripture so beautifully and briefly expresses the peculiar care and interposition of God in his behalf, and regard for His own promise, when the ark had been so long drifting before wind and wave, and the heart of man, if unsustained by faith, must have sunk in despair at the unabated waters. He sent forth a mighty wind, so that the waters assuaged, and the fountains of the deep, and windows of Heaven were stopped. At last, in the 7th month, and 17th day of the month, the bottom of the ark found a resting-place on the summit of Mount Ararat. When he felt the shock and heard the sound of his vessel once more settling upon earth, assuredly the patriarch celebrated the event, by calling his family around him in prayer and thanksgiving to Almighty God,—and laid before them in earnest exhortation His faithfulness regarding His promise, and the affiance which they should place in Him. Every future peril must be trifling compared with that which they had now escaped; how much more then may they have faith in God, that He will interpose for their deliverance. “O my sons,” he would say, “give thanks unto the Lord, and remember that His mercy endureth for ever.” The waters continually decreased, and by the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains peeped above them, and earth once again appeared, dripping with the chastisement of her sins, before the face of Heaven. Noah now ventured to make a small opening in the ark, and at the end of forty days sent forth through it a raven, to ascertain the state of the earth. The retiring waters would leave much animal matter amid the mud, upon which the raven would greedily feed; but his going to and fro shewed that the surface was as yet too soft to afford him a resting-place. After this he sent forth a dove: her strength and rapidity of flight well qualified her for an explorer; but she too returned: he then waited another interval of seven days, and sent forth the dove again. The number of days here mentioned, and afterwards repeated, seems to imply that it was on the sabbath that Noah, after his usual prayer and sacrifice, full of holy hope and reliance, sent forth these messengers: in the evening the dove returned with an olive-leaf in her mouth. We must remember that the ark, being on the central ridge of Ararat, was of course at a long distance from the lower and more genial spots where the olive grew; this indeed is declared by the absence of the dove from the ark for so many hours, bird as it is of so rapid a flight, as readily to accomplish sixty miles in the hour. When therefore the tops of the olive emerged, (and for these the dove would make, the berry being her favourite food in the East,) Noah was assured that the lower range of hills at least were emerging, and that therefore the upper range where he was, must have been sometime uncovered, and was now fast drying;—the raven, as he would fix on the first garbage he met, would tell but of the immediate neighbourhood, and that very confined, of the ark;—the dove assured him that a much wider range was emerged, and fast drying. On the next sabbath he sent her forth again; she did not return. The olive-trees therefore were now so much out of water, that the bird could roost in them, unannoyed by spray, and other accidents of water around trees; they must have stood very nearly, if not quite, out of water. Hence Noah concluded that he may shortly venture to open the ark, and walk forth. At length, in the 601st year of Noah's life, and on the first day of the first month of this new year, Noah removed the covering of the ark, and, gazing freely and uninterruptedly around, saw that the face of the ground was dry. The opening which he had previously made was probably small, and in the roof of the ark, so that he could see nothing but sky, or the distant horizon. With all his firm reliance on God, he did not think it right to dispense with all the aids of human prudence and foresight which came from God, no less than his care and protection did; therefore, he did not venture, after the Lord had shut him in, to expose the ark to any possible entrance of water, until well assured by every proper precaution. As he walked with God, so would he work with God, and make the best of His gifts. And as he had gone in by God's order, and God had shut him in, so he waited God's order to go out. On the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was dried, and this order came. And Noah went forth with his wife, and his sons, and the wives of his sons, and with all the beasts and the fowls which he had taken in. And thus the Church of God, which had been so long in suspense between earth and Heaven, once again visited earth, purified and thoroughly purged as it now was from all its former pollutions, and again fit for the Heavenly visitant.

The first thing that Noah did was to re-establish her upon it in all her former visibility, by building an altar to the Lord (most probably on the Sabbath). On this he offered burnt-offerings. And this sacrifice was accompanied with the spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving, and with the spiritual incense of prayer and praise. It was a sacrifice of

a sweet-smelling savour unto the Lord. He graciously accepted it, and decreed never more to smite any living thing as He had done. Such were the first fruits both in offering and acceptance of the harvest which followed: thus was preluded the great offering itself made upon Calvary. On re-establishing His Church on the face of the earth, God pronounced upon Noah, and his sons the blessing which He had pronounced upon Adam; "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," He said, and proceeded to renew to them the grant of sovereignty over every living creature, and the use of every green herb.—But the latter part of the grant was now enlarged. The use of every living creature was now granted for food, provided that they ate it not with the blood or life remaining in it. Perhaps the altered constitution of man, from the altered state of the earth, required this. It, however, conveys to the reflecting mind a sad memorial of the flood, an humiliating suggestion of the sinfulness which brought destruction upon the great body of mankind, and (if it be not wrong on so solemn an occasion to borrow the language of the Apostle) we eat therein our own condemnation. As it were, in admonition of the forfeit of human life, we are supported at the painful expense of the lives of our fellow-creatures. Before we can spread a feast and enlarge our hearts in joy with a friend, groans, and gasps, and cries, and struggles of agony must have been uttered by some poor innocent creature, and with this dreadful prelude we sit down. Oh! let us make a spiritual sacrifice (as slaughter has already partly made it a bodily) of such a feast, and sanctify it by humble and hearty thanksgiving, acknowledging the price at which we are fed, whether in body or in soul: in the one by the death of our fellow-creatures, in the other by the death of the Son of God. Alas! turn where we will for joy to earth or to Heaven, death is its fellow, and its price. But this additional grant required from God a positive prohibition against murder. Man formerly the mild monarch of his fellow-creatures, was now the blood-shedding despot. Like an usurper upon this earth, from which he had been for a time removed, he must maintain his existence by blood. With blood he begins, and with blood he ends his reign. Surely such familiarity with the shedding of the blood of all other kinds must make even that of his own kind less precious in his eyes, and the image of God, in which he was made, would be in danger of violation. God therefore ordained the law of the punishment of murder by death. God, moreover, to assure men against the dread of the recurrence of so fearful a judgment, entered into a special covenant with Noah, as representative of the whole living world, that He would never repeat the judgment of the flood, and for a token of this, as a faithful witness in Heaven to the latest generations, He appointed the rainbow. Thus was earth restored: and man, and beast, and bird, and herb resumed their courses in the visible economy of God.

On settling, Noah betook himself to husbandry. The nomad life of the later patriarchs was, of course, out of the question. There were not as yet either flocks or herds. Nothing more is related of Noah, except what would at first sight appear a trivial and unimportant matter of course. He planted a vineyard. But from this vineyard proceeded a curse upon one third of mankind, which is taking its course at this very day. He was probably the inventor of wine, and through inexperience of its effects drank of it less cautiously than he otherwise would have done. He was found by his son Ham lying uncovered within his tent. Instead of turning with reverent modesty aside, and clothing his nakedness, the shameless unfeeling son went and called in his two brothers to come and gaze in derision as he himself had done. They on the contrary did that which he ought to have done. For this their behaviour the two brothers received a blessing which has run and is still seen running through their posterity; and he received a curse, which is seen in the line of his children, marking them amid the mainflood of mankind, as a muddy tributary discovers its foul course through the clearness of the great stream. For To this race, devoted from that hour, belong the most awful catastrophes recorded in history. The destruction of the Canaanites, of the Carthaginians, and the Tyrians, are but the farther end of that chain of curses which in our day seems to terminate in the horrible sufferings of African slavery, and perhaps, alas! the end is not yet—many links may remain for ages still unborn. This last recorded act of Noah, has been, of course, a familiar subject of scoff and ridicule with unbelievers, who thus bring upon themselves the curse of the first scoffer. But the man of sound religious feeling will take a very different view. He will make allowance for human infirmity by having through the jealous watchfulness of self-examination discovered his own. It is men who are ignorant of themselves, and therefore also reckless of the God Who made them, that are ever ready with hard censure upon others. A clown can see the motions of the planets; but

the deep investigation of philosophy can alone discover to us the motion of the earth on which we stand. So easy is it to mark the errors of others, so difficult to find out our own. An unbelieving age is ever uncharitable, because it is self-ignorant. But let every Christian (in deed and not in name only) look up with reverence to this man of God, who was deemed worthy to be exempted from the general doom of mankind, and through whom, as through another Adam, we derive our Redeemer Himself, with every blessing spiritual and temporal which we enjoy. Amid a flood of ungodliness he was just and perfect in his generation, and walked with God. Any failing in such a man, so far from prompting us to be censorious, should rather turn us back upon ourselves in a wholesome alarm. A stronger castle than our own has been shaken. If so holy a man, who had so manfully stood up for God's honour and glory against the universal corruption of the world, was offended, may not we also? or rather have we not been? and not once, nor twice, nor thrice, but many times and often, by easy compliances (now perhaps forgotten and unrepented of) with the temper of our own times? Who are we that dare to judge a faithful servant of the Most High? Do we think it agreeable to our profession, accordant with our salvation, to take upon ourselves the accursed office of him who accuses the saints day and night before the Throne of God? Let us rather take a salutary and reverential warning from this failing of our great forefather, such as dutiful and affectionate children from a holy father, whose very infirmities we mix amid the lessons which he hath given us, so veiling those with these, as his sons did his nakedness with a garment: not deliberately and scoffingly gazing at them in his person, as did Ham. Thus we overpower the accidental gall with the natural streams of the honey of truth and righteousness which have flowed forth to us from his lips. With this mind in us, we shall keep such a watch upon ourselves, that, if the day of the Lord shall suddenly come, we shall be found in the elect family of the ark of the Church, and not amid the reckless revellers who were overwhelmed amid the riot of their merriment and marriage feasting.

Abraham

BY REV. A. G. MERCER, D.D.

"Get thee out of this country," etc.—Genesis xii. 1.

History begins with Abram. Before, it was as great broken fragments standing in the desert of the early world. In the text begins, it may be said, the history of Abram,—the first glimpse of a figure which, though only that of a simple shepherd, has proved too vast for distance to hide or for time to obscure. The history of the departure from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan began before this. His father, Terah, made the first movement, but reached no farther than Haran, "and dwelt there," and there died. His migration, perhaps, was from ordinary motives, and led with ordinary vigour, and so was cut short. Possibly, however, it was prompted by something of the same high instinct as Abram's, but weaker; and if so, it is another illustration of the interesting fact, that sometimes in the obscure parents of chosen men may be seen (as if in preparation) the rough and rudimentary outline of the great character and destiny yet to come. However this may be, the son, under some Divine instigation, took up the purpose which had dropped from the hands of Terah, and "departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." So he moves westward, reaches Canaan, and begins in his family that nation, and that history, which is the standing astonishment of the world.

In the account of Abram there seems no tendency to exaggerate. If we remember that a nation here describes its father and founder, it is remarkable to see the simplicity, soberness, and naturalness of the story. Josephus speaks of him as a Chaldean conqueror, and learned in all the mathematics and astronomy of Egypt; and the traditions of Abram in Arabia and in the East (very ancient and venerable) are in striking contrast with the domestic and family story in the Book of Genesis. There, it is a tradition of a mighty chieftain, bringing to the West his Chaldean learning of the stars. But here is nothing of this,—not one word as to that great journey, or its adventures,—whereas the faults of the man are fully laid open.

There are two ways of misconceiving such ancient Bible characters as Abram. Christian people and theologians, on the one hand, are often quite unhistorical. For-

getting all the differences of time and place,—forgetting that revelation began as a dawning day, with imperfect ideas and imperfect morals also,—we persist in giving those men a modern conscience, all the Christian lights and virtues, and reading in their minds that which belongs to ours. Now this is not only untrue and foolish, and so subjects the Bible to fault-finding; but, instead of exalting these spiritual forefathers of the race, it is unjust to them. We can never appreciate their elevation but by knowing their limitations and ignorance,—that they were streams sometimes darkened by shadows of earth, while reflecting an image of Heaven. This on the one hand. On the other, they err much more who irreverently, and ignorant of the Spirit, will see nothing here but an every-day matter. If you go into the East to-day and observe an Arab chief,—his gravity, patriarchal dignity, hospitality,—you may see a striking image of the old Abram. Yes; and something more than outside likeness,—a something really similar in character. But to stop with this and to omit the mighty Abram within, is much farther from truth than our ordinary way of looking at him as if he were a moralist or theologian of the Christian era.

I might illustrate all this by details as to Abram, but I can only speak in a general and superficial way. Though he is surrounded by little exterior grandeur, the impression is of a princely, and even an imperial person. The narrative does not hide traits of weakness, and, shall I say it? even meanness,—such as the crafty and unmanly tale to Pharaoh (still we must remember that cunning and prudence were an early form of virtue),—traits which remind us of his grandson Jacob; but in general the impression is of a noble person, specially of calm power, all the more interesting because it sometimes breaks out into fiery decision and brilliant action: as, for example, in his sudden and masterly defeat of the kings, where we see a patriarchal shepherd and herdsman transmuted in a moment into a warrior and a conqueror. In general we see repose, and a sort of large majesty, which distinguish him broadly from the somewhat insipidly calm Isaac on the one hand, and from the disturbed, spasmodic Jacob on the other. He was also a wise and energetic master of his worldly affairs, and we find in him that strong element of secularity and practice which is so opposite to the life of mere contemplation, and which has marked his race ever since. Yet how contrasted is this, as it appears in the character of Abram, with the small and passionate and selfish thought of Jacob, who (I mean on his worldly side) is the true father of the common Jew! As a result, Abram, a rich man and powerful, and yet “a pilgrim!” Of all the models for the prosperous men of this prosperous place and century, Abram is the finest,—laying hold on life with so powerful a grasp, yet confessing that he was “a stranger and a pilgrim,” that here he had “no continuing city.”

It was this simple, massive, serene character of Abram which kept him so steady to his ideas, and which gave him his peculiar power to keep others steady also. “I know him,”—this is God’s testimony,—“I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” We seem to see one of such rectitude and majesty of will that he himself moved, and moved all around him, easily, in the line which the finger of God had marked. Indeed, such an impression does he give of a power of benign command, that it is saying very little to say that the world lost in him one of its greatest natural kings. And then, observe (it is quite congenial with the strength of his nature) his quiet ease and forbearance in family quarrels, such as occurred about Sarah and Hagar, or in the quarrel between his herdsman and the herdsman of his nephew Lot. How fine and generous his settlement of that difficulty:—“And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee,” &c.

In all this, however refined we may think our civilization, Abram is a model and rebuke for us,—a model in domestic dignity and kindness and neighbourly justice. Taking the word in its best sense, do we often see such a gentleman as Abram was,—such a head of a household? Do we often see such a neighbour in forbearance and justice? But best of all his human traits was his silence. Perhaps his life was mightier in its effects than that of any other mortal man; yet it was a life of deeds, not words. Abram was the great silent prophet, who taught, and sent his influence through the world, by what he did and was. What a lesson for the silent masses of mankind!

How much in such a character, you will say, was no doubt owing to natural temperament and wisdom! True; but every quality was expanded and carried higher by that central and singular distinction in him,—his faith. The “faith of Abraham” has become a bye-word of the world. Faith was before him,—the sublime faith of Enoch and of

Noah; but to him is accorded the unparalleled dignity of beginning it on a grand scale, and of becoming the Father of the Faithful; that is, his was such a soul of faith that he was selected and made, as it were, the fountain and root of a seed and race of faith (that was the purpose), the father of a people whose mark should be faith, whose very standard of manhood should be "the faith of their father Abraham,"—who should hold up to the world a picture of simple trust and of its wonderful effects, that thus Abram might foreshadow that Being Who Himself, by a like and fuller power of filial trust, wrought all the marvels of faith, and finally carried Himself, and will carry all who share His Spirit, up through sin, through death itself, to life. A wonderful story!—but only the story of Abram repeating itself on a grander scale,—that old story of a Chaldean shepherd who by faith carried himself and all his, from distant and outer lands, to the land of promise and rest.

It is not my purpose, however, to speak of the great scheme of faith, but simply of its beginning in the faith of Abram. Pause and think of that. A simple and hardy shepherd, living in Haran, to the north and east, received some monition, I need not say what, that the God, Whose idea filled his soul, commanded him away, far to the south and west. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." He moves "as the Lord hath spoken unto him," "not knowing whither he went,"—he moves—through what hindrances we know not; but they did not stop him,—through what delays we know not; but no forgetfulness or wavering or sinking of will! Ordered onward, onward he goes. Now, at last, he is there; but no foothold. He still journeys, a sort of natural pilgrim. Possession is reserved to his posterity! A strange disappointment! It seemed almost as if he were paltered with,—all this done, endured, and the promise not kept. Yet he still believes, and his hopes are now for his posterity. But time goes on, and he grows old, childless, and the thing becomes impossible. This at last staggers him. What can surpass the truth and interest of that chapter in which the Lord says to him: "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, What wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless?" Taking him out under the Eastern Heavens,—“Look now toward Heaven,” (Is there any thing more beautiful in literature? is there any thing more dramatic and sublime?) “and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.” So He gives him in his old age a child, even Isaac. And now all is righted, and splendid promises and hopes are his! But the stern discipline of his life has yet one great, unequalled trial for him,—the last, the highest; shall I not say the highest ever met by mortal man?—the command: “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac,” &c.

Whatever objections may be made, one thing is clear; imagination cannot devise any thing beyond it, as just the test to bring forth all that was in the man, and to illustrate for ever the possibilities of the heart in the region of faith. But what a proposal! This at last! How could it be done? It could be done and was done only by a man who had such a supereminent sense of the sacredness and charm of God's will, that for it he could go against all things! Here was the occasion when at last all confidence, all affectionate trust in God must break and give way! The human heart cannot do this. Yes; the human heart, inspired by God's own Spirit, did it; and it remains for ever a monument of the soul of man, grander to the eyes of God than the natural Heavens and earth.

Abraham said nothing,—not one word. It was beyond all speech. He arose and took with him his son, his only son Isaac; and with whatever unutterable convulsions and pangs, yet held to God—and lifted the knife! It was just what Job said afterward: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

If we think of what he really knew of God, and the adoration and trust he gave to Him, and then of what we know of God, especially as One made unspeakably adorable in Christ, we shall see something vastly in Abraham's favour. He had but poor food to live on. It is startling to think how little truth he began with; yet such was the healthy energy of his heart that he drew from it the noblest health, while we, with our aged and sickly spirits, are starving on the richest.

If we were as faithful to the truth we are heirs to as Abraham was to his, I know not where or how high we should be carried! Then, the most striking fact was the

poorness of the truth and the grandeur of the heart. Now, the most striking fact is the grandeur of our truth and the poor response of the heart.

Let us do better,—at least a little. The same Spirit Which was mighty then is mighty now. If He were willing then, He is willing now. Let us have faith. If we do but lift up our hearts to it, what is so natural, so congenial to our weakness, so Divinely pleasing, as to be children and have a child's trust? A Presence as solemn as ever Abraham saw walks with us; a Voice talks with us. Listen. You hear nothing; but that silence is full of God and speaks. What says He in this holy silence? To each soul it first announces the great call: "Arise, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." What land? The broad land of uprightness and peace! And if we arise and move at the Divine instigation, we shall hear (though all be silent), we shall hear that Voice not less really than Abraham heard it; and in all the errors of our way it will be behind us, saying: "This is the way, walk ye in it." In the solitude of the night, and the despondency of the heart, when our hopes fail, we shall hear: "Fear not; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." And He will take us out under the Heavens, and show us the stars, and tell us of the "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." The speeches, the promises, the comforts of God are not reserved for Abraham, are not gone. It is only we who have waxed dull of hearing. He speaks. We also are His children. Doubtless He is also our Father.

If we but learned to listen to the Eternal Voice!—learned constantly to go back out of the noise of the world into the silence, and to hear what the silence says; then we should make our religion a hushed, reverent, obedient listening to God,—no more!

Abraham

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"Get thee out of thy country," etc.—Genesis xii. 1.

Such was the summons, and the obedience of Abram was immediate and complete. The traditions of a life were broken up, he went forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. xi. 8). The bitterness of that first parting with kinsmen and relatives and accustomed scenes and the habits of a life was mercifully lessened by his aged father Terah's going forth with him into the unknown land. How the old man was moved to this migration we can but guess. Nahor, the eldest son of the house, was dead: and though Haran, the second brother, remained at Ur, yet it may well be that Terah saw in the character of Abram that which marked him out as the foremost of his family, and therefore clung to the mysterious fortunes of his youngest son. And so they journeyed, as men journeyed in those days of old, with sons and daughters, and shepherds, and man-servants and maid-servants, and goods, across the roadless steppes, by the tracks which other travellers had marked upon the great plain. At Charran, in Mesopotamia, the cloudy pillar of God's presence halted, and for a while the migration stayed. There for Terah's lifetime they abode; understanding, however, as it seems, that this was but a broken halt, and that the more distinct summons of the original command beckoned him yet farther. And so, when Terah's bones were laid in their resting-place, the march again began, and upon a grander scale. As yet, though parted from their early home, the wanderers had not altogether quitted the land of their nativity. That patriarchal realm was bounded by the mighty Euphrates—the "great river," "the flood"; the "other side" of which to those ancient men was little less of a partition from all they knew of life than were the waters of the great Atlantic to the adventurous Columbus. Right across the flood the mystic summons called the son of Terah, and over it he dutifully sped, and came into the land of Canaan.

This second migration is marked as the turning-point of his life—the first great venture of his faith. The former migration had been one of those tribe movements which appertained to the early history of man, when from the East, in which he had been cradled, he moved forward, as the tides of ocean sway under the moon, "to replenish the earth and possess it." Then, his father, Terah, is spoken of as "having taken Abram, and they went forth from Ur of the Chaldees"; but now the patriarch goes forth alone; now the Voice calls him, and he follows. "The Lord said unto Abram,

Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. . . . So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him. . . . And Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran."

On the whole face of the replenishing earth such another sight was nowhere to be seen. It was the single grand spectacle of humanity on which Angels gazed with wondering joy. He was perhaps then the sole type of that one true Man Who in the after-ages should spring from his seed to do the Will of God perfectly; to hear always that voice, and always to follow it. This nobleness, different indeed in measure, but in kind the same, the faith of Abram imparted to his soul. He rose above this earth because he believed simply in God. This is the record of the Highest. When Abram was ninety years old and nine, "the Lord appeared and said unto him, Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." This was the one grandeur of his life; and this was to be for ever commemorated in the new name given to him. "Neither shall thy name be any more Abram" ("father of elevation"), "but thy name shall be Abraham" ("father of a multitude"). This walking before God it was which invested him with that glorious character which the voice of the Lord Himself, when speaking to Abimelech, attributed to him. "He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live" (Gen. xx. 7). We never read of Abraham's predicting the future, and yet he was, for the voice of God declared it, "a prophet."

It is full of instruction for us to see wherein his prophetic character consisted. For we shall have poor and unworthy conceptions concerning the mighty office of the prophets of Jehovah so long as we confound them with the tribe of the mere predictors of the future. Such a prescience was indeed often imparted to the prophet to qualify him for his office. But first it was the accident not the essence of his office. In the soothsayer and the oracle priestess, on the contrary, that declaration of the future, real or pretended, by guess or enigma, by dark sign or darker word, was the very central point of the whole ministration. Men came in the hope of having the blinding curtain which hung over the future lifted for them; they sought nothing else; they could receive nothing more. But so it was not with the prophet of Jehovah. He was the witness to man of the living God of righteousness and truth. If he did predict, he did it to shake some ungodly heart with terror, or to build up some faithful soul in hope. Abram, though, so far as we know, he uttered no predictions, was a grand fulfiller of this office. By his simple obedience and his glorious faith he bore a witness to Jehovah such as no other man then living, perhaps as no other mere man through all the generations of the sons of Adam, ever equalled.

But, again, the prophet of Jehovah differs from the soothsayers in this essential feature of his predictive faculty. The more oracular utterance declared, or professed to declare, some isolated and disjointed fact, foreseen in itself by some accidental prescience, as the eye may see some solitary star through a chance opening in the cloudy canopy which veils the general heavens. Instead of this, the true prophet's revelation of the future based itself on the present and on the past. On the present, because to him who believes in the righteous government of the all-good and the unchangeable the present is ever full of types of the future, which, until they are fulfilled all remain dark to common eyes, but which are opened to the reading of his instructed gaze; and on the past, because that past as it lies written in history is but the record of God's dealings heretofore with man; and it is the ever-unfolding line of God's dealings which is opened to him. The law and the right of the moral government of the mighty King, not the unmeaning triviality of some separate event which an idle or an interested curiosity longs to foreknow, is that which it is given to him to discern. To him therefore the past is the future, as that future lies yet folded up and waiting for its development within the germinating seed; and to him therefore prophecy is history prolonged. His prediction, whether in word or in act, is the utterance of his spirit, as under the teaching of the Spirit of Jehovah it reaches forth into that yet future development of the truth and right with which it now commences in God.

Now, such a gift of prophecy as this was most surely given to Abraham. For Christ has said, "Abraham desired to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." The great insight of his faith reached on so far as that. When he received as simply true the word of God concerning the birth of Isaac—against hope believing in hope that he might become the father of many nations—not staggering at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able to perform, as the God Who calleth those things

which be not as if they were (Rom. iv. 17—21), then he received the promise of a true Son, in Whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. Here we see before our eyes this great insight of the prophet of Jehovah into the typical character of the present; for in this gift of Isaac beyond the rule of nature he read the gift of the virgin-born; in the present son of promise, the coming in the fulness of time of the promised seed; in the son of Sarah, the Son of Mary. It may well be that his eye was opened to read further types which for others lay impenetrably folded up in the blinding present. As he climbed the hill of sacrifice, ready to accomplish that vast venture of his unquestioning faith, may he not have seen in the child of promise, bearing beside him up the steep the wood of the sin-offering, the figure of the Child of far greater promise, of the Desire, not of his eyes only, but of all nations, as He too bore up the hill of Calvary the wood on which He was to be offered up, the one sacrifice for sin? Surely he foresaw the offering of the one sacrifice for sin when he saw the day of Christ and was glad. Nay, may we not gather that even the mighty mystery of the Resurrection of the Lord was read by him in the giving back to him of Isaac, from those pregnant words of the Epistle to the Hebrews which tell us that his faith grasped the seemingly audacious hope that "God was able to raise Isaac even from the dead"?

This prophetic gift, then, we may trace in Abraham.

But further, it is the prophet's office not only to read, but also to declare the future. This he may do in word or in act. Ezekiel as truly prophesied in act, when, at God's command he portrayed the city of Jerusalem on a hill, and laid siege against it, and cast a mound against it, and lay on his right side and then on his left side, as when he uttered the predictive words which foretold the coming judgment. And in act, who was a greater prophet than Abraham? His whole life was, in the highest sense of the mysterious word, a prophecy. This leaving Charran, this "crossing of the flood," what else were they but acted prophecies of the mighty truth which shines conspicuously in the Gospel pages, that the man who would inherit the Heavenly Canaan must be content to leave father and mother and all that he hath, and to follow houseless and homeless the call of Jesus? And as it was from the beginning, so it was unto the end. Almost every recorded fact in Abraham's life is full of prophecy. In this high sense he is indeed the father of the faithful; and the history of all his children is fore-acted in himself. How simply and emphatically was he in act the true forerunner of all who ever since have "died in faith!" Thus it was in the point of his history which we had reached. After the signal obedience which was accomplished in his leaving, at God's call, his home and all that he had, and crossing the Euphrates, to be led on he knew not whither, he is brought to the northern fords of Jordan, and crosses over them into the land of his future inheritance. The district that he entered was the most fertile of that whole valley of abundance. He passed up the valley of the Jabbok into the plain of Moreh. There, when his eye had been filled with the sense of beauty which is so keenly awakened after a weary journey through a waste, by the sight of abundance and verdure, "the Lord appeared unto Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. xii. 7). There, in the fulness of his grateful trust, Abram built his first altar in the land of promise to the God Who had appeared unto him. Perhaps he thought that all his wanderings were over, that thenceforward he might know again in this land of beautiful fertility the sweetnesses of home; but it was not to be so. He is indeed allowed to halt for a season in the earthly paradise he had entered. The first taste of the good land was to be one of rest after labour, of enjoyment after suffering, of the springing water and the vine and olive, after the droughty, fruitless, barren desert. But the rest was not to last long, or even his faithful energy might have been relaxed; for "over sweetness breedeth gall, and too much joy, even spiritual, maketh men wanton"; and so he tastes and passes on. All that he looks upon shall be his; but it is not his yet: "the Canaanite was then in the land." The enemy must be cast out before the joy of the faithful can be full. The time of that deliverance is hidden deep in the unrevealed counsels of God. In Abraham's day the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full: for all his children in faith the mystery of iniquity is not yet accomplished. Of that day and that hour knoweth no man. But it shall come. Evil shall be driven in upon itself: the seven nations of the wicked shall be driven out. The heir of all things shall possess the earth. And so the rich plain is to be left almost as soon as it has been gained; and from its luxurious ease the guiding pillar leads him on to the safe but barren upland. There he pitches his tent, "on a mountain on the east of Bethel, having Bethel on the west and Hai on the east"; and there again "he buildeth an altar unto the Lord, and

called on the name of the Lord." Bethel and Hai, names unknown as yet in any sacred story, famous as they shall thereafter become for God's dealings with His people, for God's revelation to His saints. As yet there was no Bethel, no "house of God"; it was known only as the district lying near to Luz, a heathen city of the elder Canaanite possession, the dreary dwelling-place of the godless and the idol worshippers. That first altar to Jehovah, as it rose under the hand of Abram, was itself a prophecy of all that was to follow; it foretold God's gracious vision to the wandering outcast from the family of Isaac; and again God's meeting him, as he came back from Padan-aram, and, after the mysterious night wrestling, endowing him with the name of Israel—that name of mystic significance, whether it be "thou hast contended," or, as the elders have it, the "prince with God." It prophesied of the time when the ark of the covenant should here be fixed, with Aaron's grandson ministering before it, and when the repentant children of Israel should come here in their extremity to seek succour and direction from their fathers' God (Judges xx. 18, 31; xxi. 2).

Yet even here, at his mountain encampment, the faithful wanderer was not long to halt. To make his act of prophecy perfect, he was to be as destitute of any fixed habitation as is the Bedouin Arab of the wilderness. "Abram journeyed, going on still towards the south" (Gen. xii. 9). He was to show that he had "embraced the promises of God and confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth."

Then began those perpetual marches of his consecrated tent wherewith he moved up and down the land which his seed was hereafter to inherit, though not so much was given him in possession as to set his foot upon. And so with some brief, interposed intervals, in which he sojourned in Egypt, or amongst the Philistine lords on the plains which skirted the neighbouring seaboard, his long after-life was spent upon the rocky ridges and high grassy uplands of the hill country of Canaan; on which there slept in the sunlight, or fluttered beneath the sweeping breezes of the night, the white folds of the great wanderer's tent. What a sight it was for the watchers of God's angel host, as they marked the man of faith standing well-nigh alone on a rebellious, unbelieving earth, building from post to post his altar to the Lord, confessing His name, doing His Will, interceding for offenders, communing as a man communes with his friend, with the Almighty Jehovah!

As those sacred circuits measured out the land, attesting its future possession by the faithful, what a prophecy did they utter of the setting up, on the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, of Messiah's Kingdom! For within those circling folds there was gathered, in seed and promise, all the future Church of Christ. There was the family in covenant with Jehovah; there, the living faith which from generation to generation joins the soul of man to God. There was the only sure knowledge of the one true God; there, the revelation of His Will. There, in the mysterious visitation of the three stranger forms before his tent door, subsiding into the single presence of Jehovah, was already a declaration of the hidden mystery of the Trinity in Unity. There, given perhaps already by sacred tradition from Noah—there, in vision, in dream, and by voice, vouchsafed to the watching patriarch, was all which should grow, under the prophetic breathing of the future, into the lively oracles of God. There, already, faith spread its strong wing, and soared in what were hereafter David's Messianic Psalms, and Isaiah's evangelic predictions. There, in the shadows of the covenant, sealed in circumcision and renewed in burnt-offerings, were the great sacraments of the Gospel Church, waiting only the appointed day of their open manifestation.

Surely, in no other time or place has the earth ever seen a life like that of the hero patriarch, which God's hand had shut within those enfolding curtains. By many a fire of furnace heat that great soul was tempered and annealed to do and bear without reserve the Will of God. When, leaving all behind him, he crossed in simple trust the great river, he would, in man's judgment, have been pronounced already perfect in faith. Yet further trial brought to light an unsuspected weakness even in that great heart, and under a wholly new temptation the faith even of the father of the faithful wavered. A famine drove him into Egypt, which was even then beginning to develop its early heathen civilisation, strongly marked with deep lines of sensual indulgence and despotic power. The tented wanderer shrank as the Arab of the desert shrinks from the crowded city life, and he who through his desert migration and mountain wanderings had found ever in those vast solitudes abundant companionship in the presence of his God, felt himself forsaken and alone in the more depressing isolation of being immersed in the full busy stream of a life which was separated in every sympathy from his own. In

this depression his great heart sank within him, and he sought to save his life, endangered through the coveted beauty of Sarai, by the denial of his wife. God was better to him than his fears, and delivered him from the danger which he dreaded, and he came up from Egypt enriched by the largess of its king, and safe under the shadow of the Almighty hand.

To purge away this remaining weakness he was still held by the hand of Love in the furnace heat. It was specially in all that concerned the child of promise that the long discipline and perfecting of his faith lay. There was first the long nine-and-twenty years of waiting from the date of the first promise for this still protracted birth. The slow years of waiting crept on until to mere nature the gift seemed to be impossible. Then when Isaac had been given there was the casting forth of Ishmael, who it is plain had greatly engaged the affections of the otherwise childless father. The thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son (Gen xxi. 11). Then, so far as Scripture has recorded his life, there was a lull in the sharp discipline of the great patriarch. The early years of Isaac's life passed peacefully, and he grew up in his father's tent, a meek and docile son, from childhood to maturity. But when this one delight of the aged pair, this gift beyond nature, this heir of so many promises, was something more than twenty years of age, once more his father's faith was subjected to the signal trial into which all the lesser ones of his life ran up and found their completion. He is called upon to offer up this beloved son, the one gift of gifts, in sacrifice upon the mountain of Moriah. He hears the voice, and he obeys: slowly up the hill of sacrifice his patient feet climb; the victim bearing the wood for the burnt-offering by his side. His faith is tested to the very uttermost. For not until the sacrificial knife is raised to slay his son is that obedient hand stayed. This was the last great act of his discipline. Now at last his noble, single-hearted faith was perfected. So the voice of God proclaimed: "By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord: for because thou hast done this thing," &c. (Gen. xxii. 16-18).

The special purpose of the sacred records of the life of Abraham is written plain upon their surface. They are chosen with the one plain purpose of illustrating in this chiefest example the life of faith. They show us its root in the word of Jehovah; its fruit in simple obedience; in the grandeur of an unflinching trust; in the fulness of a life of sacrifice. They show us its nourishment in secret communings with God, its reward in the gift of righteousness, and with that the promised inheritance of the world.

Abraham

BY RIGHT REV. JAMES FRASER, D.D.

"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith," etc.—Galatians iii. 7-9.

"The types of the Book of Genesis," says an ingenious and pious writer, "exhibit God's great dispensational purposes and the course appointed for man's development." By the phrase "dispensational purposes," he means "the mode in which God, at various periods since the Fall, has dealt with man, in different degrees of intimacy, and in a certain sense, also on different principles." "Throughout all He has had one purpose in view—to reveal what He is, and to show what man is; but this one end has been brought about in different ways and under various repeated trials."

I demur, however, to the statement that in the course of this development the Creator has dealt with the creature even "in a certain sense," on different principles. The outward manifestation of the principle may have been different, but the inward power and energy of it have been the same. The God of the Old Testament is the God also of the New. The proclamation of the name of the Lord to Moses on Mount Sinai—"the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generation"—is as true now as it was then.

The God of the Jews, says St. Paul, is also the God of the Gentiles. Faith is the condition of justification to "the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision." "The righteousness of God manifested without the law"; rather perhaps should it have been

translated, "manifested without an accompanying code of rules," embodied in a Divine Person, was yet "witnessed by the law and the prophets" (Rom. iii. 21).

"God," says the text, "preached the Gospel to Abraham." The very oath sworn to him by his Maker was, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, designed to show to the heirs of promise, down the whole stream of time, the immutability of God's counsels. God forbid, cries St. Paul, that any one should think that the law—the schoolmaster who was to bring us to Christ—was against the promises of God. Though the sanctions of the two covenants might be different—a circumstance which does not in the least affect the moral obligation—the terms on which they dealt with man were the same. This development may be more complete, more uniform, more equable, more progressive, under the Gospel than under the law, but the direction of that development was ever, if not consciously towards Christ, at least towards Christianity. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day," said Christ, "and he saw it and was glad."

And so these men, living under what we sometimes call "another dispensation," and certainly surrounded by very different circumstances, may yet be regarded as typical. They have their message for us "on whom the ends of the world are come." "They sought a country," a brighter, better land than any which their feet had ever trod, or on which their eye had ever rested. "They died in faith," "confessing themselves strangers and pilgrims," "persuaded of the promises" and embracing them, though they never actually received them—indeed, they seemed ever to retreat from their yearning gaze. Even now they are waiting with us for their perfection. Even now their impatience, perchance, has to be quelled, like that of the souls seen beneath the altar, who cried with a loud voice, "How long?" They must rest yet for a little season until the number of their fellow-servants is fulfilled, and the better thing revealed, which God is providing for both us and them.

And of this patient, saintly, faithful band, who *being dead yet seem to speak—the cloud of witnesses by whom we are compassed about as we run our Christian race—Abraham is the foremost figure. It is with him that we shall sit down to eat meat in the Kingdom of God. In his bosom they that sleep in Jesus find a resting-place. In the steps of his faith we are to walk. The Israel of God are "the seed of Abraham, His friend."

Abraham, to the eye of St. Paul, before and above any other saint in the annals of his race, is the representative of the *nature* of faith, and of its *power*: faith, not as opposed to reason—for faith must be rational, or it degenerates into fanaticism or credulity—but as opposed to sight. Faith, not so much a function or faculty of the intellect, as a posture or condition of the will: moral in its nature rather than intellectual; "casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Never, perhaps, was there a time in the history of the Church of Christ in which there was greater need to ascertain carefully what this typical faith of our father Abraham was. It was not the acceptance of a highly-developed, articulated creed. It was not the investiture of the act of worship with an elaborate ceremonial symbolism. It was not a fanatical conception of the media through which the Spirit of man seeks, and finds, communion with the Spirit of God. The simple Bible record of it is, "Abraham *believed God*"; and "it was counted to him for righteousness," because his whole life was the continued evidence of the reality of his faith. It was not *perfect*, but it was *real*. It rested on the simplest verities—on the providence of God and His sovereignty, His rewarding those that diligently seek Him, the efficacy of prayer, the reasonableness and the comfort of worship—these, and little more than these truths and practices, made up Abraham's creed, his religion.

Some have thought that revelations were made to Abraham which would have enabled him to see as far into the purposes of God as did St. John or St. Paul; and particularly that after the averted sacrifice on Mount Moriah the whole mystery of Calvary was unrolled before his eyes—that this is the sense in which "he saw Christ's day." We will try to discover presently whether there may not be a more congruous interpretation of our Lord's word than this. Suffice it to say now that all this is mere assumption, foisted into the Scripture record, not only gratuitously, but utterly marring the proportions, and structure, and development of the revelation of God's purposes to man. It is not only a vain invention; it is an anachronism.

No; the merit of Abraham's faith lay not so much in the *breadth* as in the intensity of its view; not so much in its comprehensive grasp of the whole scheme of God, as in

its deep persuasion of the duty of man. It was the faith of a saint rather than of a theologian. So was it also in the older and better days of Christendom. The faith that could remove mountains—and there was a grace even higher than that—was simply the intense energy of a soul throwing the whole force of its being upon the promises of God. The condition of the Saviour's putting forth His healing power was, "Believe only and thou shalt be made whole." When the Ethiopian eunuch asked his Heaven-sent teacher whether, through the mystic instrument of the new birth he might enter into the "better covenant" with God, Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest"; and he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." When St. Paul proclaims the word of faith which he preached, it is simply this: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The Gospel that he delivered to the Corinthians, wherein they stood, by which also they were saved, contained expressly only three grand articles—"how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day" (1 Cor. xv. 1-4).

I know, of course, what is *involved* in these grand, simple utterances of primitive faith, but I am dealing only with what is *expressed*. The implicated truths are not formulated: the inferential dogmas are not authoritatively imposed. It seems to have been the purpose of the Church in her earliest and best days to make men religious rather than theological; to limit, rather than to extend, the field of authoritative dogma; to discourage speculative, gnostic tendencies. and to win her way against those that opposed themselves rather by the power of living convictions and saintly graces, than by the canons of councils, and the elaboration of creeds.

A simple, earnest faith in the mission and work of Christ; a deep profound consciousness of the sinfulness of man, and of his need of something beyond himself to lift him out of the mire; a strong conviction that God is ever to be found by those that seek Him, and that He will, "with every temptation make a way of escape," that He is the believer's "shield and exceeding great reward"; and a consistent endeavour to walk before Him in perfectness, as One to Whom we owe the best service of our lives—this, or something like this, would be the faith of Abraham illuminated by the light of the Gospel; adapted to the phenomena of the revelation which has thrown a fresh tint over the life that "now is as well as on that which is to come." Sure I feel that it is faith enough to be "counted" to us "for righteousness"; faith enough to fix our hopes "on the city which hath foundations"; faith enough to sustain us under earthly trials and disappointments, "as seeing Him Who is invisible."

A consistent endeavour to frame the life so as to be in accordance with these convictions, so that what we *are* should be an expression to others of what we *believe*—avoiding the greatest of moral contradictions, the spiritual state which has the "form of godliness" but is dead to its power—this is what the Apostle means by "walking by faith and not by sight"; being "saved by hope"; living with the eye fixed, not on the things which are "seen and temporal," but on the things which are "unseen, and eternal."

The faith of Abraham is the sufficient account of all the moral phenomena of his character: of his obedience, his unselfishness, his courage, his generosity, his placableness, his patience, his power of self-surrender. He seems never to have needed to sit down first and count the cost of what he was about to do. The Divine instinct of his faith in God superseded the necessity of such laborious calculations. To him, the Almighty God—the Lord Who had provided and would still provide, the God Who had listened to his intercessory prayer, and remembered him when He destroyed the cities of the plain and spared Lot for his sake, the Great Being with Whom he had entered into covenant—was not a mere name, had not been petrified into a conventionalism, nor become a metaphysical abstraction. He was *his* God; a constant source of strength and energy; the God before Whom he lived and Who was with him in all that he did.

It was a faith almost evangelical in its nature. It stretched far beyond the horizon of this present world. It never looked back; it was always looking forward. His whole life declared plainly, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews testifies, that "he sought not the country from which he came out," to which he might have returned, but that "he desired a better country—that is, an Heavenly"; "wherefore God was not ashamed to be called his God, for He prepared for him a city."

Seeking God's blessing, not as his children were taught by Moses to seek it, in the fruit of his body, nor in the fruit of his cattle, nor in the fruit of his ground, but "in

the joy and peace of believing"; in the precious gift of a "conscience void of offence towards God and towards men"; realising the higher life of the Spirit, and leaving it to others to quarrel about pasture-lands and flocks and herds, do we find the evangelical temper of his faith. Not in any fancied anticipatory revelation of the great mystery of godliness, afterwards to be wrought out by Him Who, when He came to deliver man, "took not on Him the nature of Angels, but the seed of Abraham"; but in this higher and more natural sense, I conceive we are to understand that this great saint of God "rejoiced to see the day of Christ, and saw it, and was glad." He saw it, not at one particular place, nor at one particular time; not only on Mount Moriah, when "in a figure" he had received his only-begotten son from the dead, but all his life through—wherever he pitched his tent, and built his altar, and waited patiently for the promise, and found himself strong from his trust in God.

For what is "Christ's day" but that measure of knowledge of the will of God which it is our privilege to enjoy, and those opportunities of access to Him which all have, though all may not use? Even to us who live in the middle of that day, the light can be called neither clear nor dark. The knowledge is partial and fragmentary; the view is "through a glass" and full of riddles: the hopes, but not the eyes, enter into that which is within the veil. And just so, with less precise knowledge perhaps, but perhaps also with even intenser insight, fared Abraham.

What does Christ do for those who consciously live in the light of this day? He lifts them up from earth to Heaven; "sets their affections on things above"; helps them to understand what that meaneth—"Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

It must have been the same influence, the same Divine light, which guided the steps of Abraham when he left house, and substance, and friends, at what he believed to be the bidding of God, and went out a homeless wanderer, "not knowing whither he went": that let Lot have the best of the land, instead of going to a judge and saying, "Bid my brother divide the inheritance with me": that waited those five and twenty years "because he knew Him faithful that had promised": and, clearest instance of all, that taught him on Mount Moriah that sublime lesson of self-sacrifice which can cheerfully surrender everything to the even suspected will of God.

And so when the blessed Jesus would reprove the eye-service and hypocrisy of those "who honoured God with their lips, while their heart was far from Him," He can find no more effective contrast by which to set forth the hollowness of such service than the faithful Abraham "rejoicing to see His day." They might be Abraham's natural seed, these hypocritical worshippers, but they were not Abraham's spiritual children. They might call Abraham their father, but they did not the works of Abraham. They thought it impossible that they could ever lose their spiritual prerogatives; but they were told that God, if He pleased, could even of the stones of the highway "raise up children unto Abraham."

The Psalmist's account of the forfeiture by the Israelites of their spiritual privileges, and their gradual degeneration as a people, is "that their heart was not whole with God"; and so "they continued not steadfast in His covenant." Abraham was a marked contrast to his posterity in this respect. If ever there was a man whose heart might be called *whole* with God, it was he: more so certainly than David: more so perhaps even than Moses. It was the special characteristic quality of his faith: its entirety, its roundness, its complete submission to the will of God. Do not dwell on its few specks and flaws, on its equivocation in the courts of Pharaoh and Abimelech, on its impatience evidenced by the marriage with Hagar: reckon its triumphs, its achievements. The Bible, with its rare truthfulness, portrays the whole man for us, in his strength and in his weakness, and, as ever, that "strength made perfect in weakness."

No character drawn in Holy Writ seems to be the property of all time more than he.

There is nothing Jewish about him; nothing local; nothing essential that can be called the product of his age, the result of his peculiar circumstances. He is a grand, statuesque type of the grace of faith: faith in its essence rather than in its development: faith in the power, the providence, the sovereignty of God. Alas! how much more truly did he see Christ's day than we see it! How much nearer did he reach the measure of the stature of Christ's fulness than we can! How far beyond our poor attainments was he penetrated with that transcendent Christian grace which "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and finally, never fails."

In the inquisitive temper of a realistic age, an interest has been re-awakened in the Hebrew patriarch's grave. To have visited the mausoleum at Hebron is one of the

achievements of Eastern travel. There, in their sepulchres, though in outward form strangely different from that natural cave "in the end of Ephron's field" where first their bones were laid—cave and field and trees having long since disappeared—there still lies the dust of Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac, and Jacob, "the heirs with him of the same promise." It hardly needs a visit to the tomb to realise the lesson it conveys. "Of illustrious men," said the great Athenian statesman, "every land is the sepulchre." The grave of Abraham is dear even to those who count not their descent from him. Standing in imagination, reverently before either the memory of his life or the sepulchre of his dust, our hearts are kindled with the single thought of the conquering might of true and living faith. "The victory," cries one who himself had proved its power, "the victory that overcometh the world is faith."

Lot

BY REV. GEORGE M. BOYNTON.

"Abram went up out of Egypt . . . and Lot with him," etc.—Genesis xiii. 1—13.

I. THERE ARE DECISIVE MOMENTS IN ALL OUR LIVES.

There are times when the quiet growth and training of the past culminates in one grand expression. The tree which had been covered with its thickening mantle of greenness bursts into blossom in a day. There are hours when character is fixed as by some powerful mordant, and thenceforth the writing is indelible. There are minutes in which destiny is determined, as one may step to this side or to that of the sharp crest of a hill. These are the times in which we make the choices on which our future lives depend. It is such a time in the life of the still youthful Lot that we are to consider.

Such times come surely to us all,—not once alone, perhaps, though perhaps only once,—from the decisions of which henceforth we do not swerve. More often a few such opportunities come to a life, and they come chiefly in its youth. There had been one before to Abram's nephew, when the first pilgrim called of God to change his home started to go away from Ur, he knew not where. Evidently he did not go alone. Those who shared somewhat his faith in God, his willingness to hear and heed the Divine call, went with him. They at least revered the lofty character of the patriarch. It is especially recorded in this first setting-out of Abram that Lot went with him.

He shared the good man's fortunes and misfortunes; the partings, which were doubtless hard; the deliberate setting forth after a better land, a better life, and a better promise. Together they went from Ur to Haran and from Haran to Canaan, these pilgrims, emigrants, Hebrews: that is, men who came over. Through the land they went in company to Sichem and to Bethel, still going south. So far from finding it a land of milk and honey, it was not even then a land of grass and grain. Famine drove them to Egypt—Lot and Abram and Abram's sister-wife. Back again northward they return to the land that had been deeded to them, Abram very rich now in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And Lot shared his prosperity as he had been partner in his privations.

And now the very abundance of their possessions makes it impossible for them to remain together unless their interests are absolutely one. Such they evidently are not. Strife comes among the servants. Mine and thine must be set apart. The time of choice has come. The older man clearly and kindly makes the issue. The offer is accepted, and in perfect freedom the younger man chooses his portion and friendly but finally leaves his uncle.

These same moments of decision come to each young man or woman once for all, or oftener—the choice of a pursuit in life, or the deliberate giving-up of all pursuit; the yielding to temptation, even to innocent enjoyment in the presence of pressing duty; the companion, helpful or not, whom one makes his chosen friend; the selfishness which one permits to overcome his better and more generous self, or which he slays before it; more than all, the decision to make the law of Christ the law of life, and to make Him its Master or to reject both law and Lord: a choice which is made practically in these lesser things often, as they are lighted up by His Divine precept and example. This is the critical hour of choice, in which the grand decision is made of which all others are only the renewed expressions.

II. CHOICE IS BOTH THE EXPRESSION OF CHARACTER AND ITS DETERMINATION.

So Lot shows what is in him, as Abram reveals his character in this choice. These two men, classed together, doubtless, up to this time in general character and general purpose, are henceforth contrasted—as widely separated in character as from this time in location.

Abram is prayerful: building an altar, calling on the name of the Lord. Lot's name is not associated with his in these acts of devotion. Abram looks to the Lord, and Lot looks to the land. The uncle seeks guidance from above; the nephew makes calculations from the things that he can see. It is the contrast of the prayerful with the worldly spirit, of the man who takes God into the account and the man who leaves Him out.

Abram showed himself to be a man of peace. Lot let the quarrelling go on;—who knows but he may profit by it in the end? It is the older man who makes the overture: "Let there be no strife"; though by-and-by he shows himself to be the vigorous man of war, when Lot is taken captive and Abram in his old age pursues the captors and delivers the man who was in better years for fighting than himself. It is not the last time in history when the most valiant warrior has been the man of all men to say: "Let us have peace."

Abram was generous beyond the demands of ordinary liberality. He gave up the rights of his seniority, of family headship; chose to give up his choice, and let the younger man take what seemed to him best. And Lot took it. He did not look to Abram's interests any more than he looked to the Lord for guidance. He only saw the well-watered plains of Jordan. Abram might have the dry hills. He would be content with the moist plains. Perhaps he even assumed a little virtuousness in being willing to move and take the lands that were not nearest them, and did not call attention to the fact that they seemed to him, by contrast with what was left to Abram, like the Eden of early tradition or the Egypt of recent memory.

Abram was the faithful friend. The friend of God is always the friend of man as well. Prosperity in this case, as in so many others, tested their friendship and fidelity more than adversity. Poverty and loneliness might bring them close together. While Abram was growing very rich, and Lot, the junior partner, was catching the over-flow and coming to the possibility of self-support, he would by no means leave his advantage. But now that he has come to independence and can get no more out of his association with his older friend, but rather lose by it, he is quite ready to sever the connection.

And so Lot becomes a type of the worldly and the selfish, while Abram stands out more conspicuously than before for the godly man, seeking a city to come and realizing that the things which are seen are temporal and the things which are not seen are eternal.

III. THE FOLLY OF A WORLDLY CHOICE.

The man who leaves out God, God's purpose for us and God's calling, is never wise and never comes to true success. The man who makes his decisions on the mere ground of worldly advantage is never sure and never safe. The example we are studying is striking in this regard. It is shown, whether you consider it as a mere natural succession of causes and effects or as a matter of super-natural awards.

Abram, seeking Divine guidance and showing a strange disregard of immediate advantage, stays in the elevated plains of the hill-country. It is a position more secure for defence and for developing the hardihood of his men. Here they become not only shepherds, but warriors. But more than all, here he is apart from the contagion of the easy living of the valley and the licentious perversion of the city. Among the oaks of Mamre he dwelt apart in the simplicity of his earlier life. He who had been called away from the nature-worship of his fathers to a purer faith would not defile that faith with the worse abominations of the cities of the plain. So he kept clean and simple—lost neither the faith by which he trusted God nor the works by which he trained his household and rescued his nephew; so he grew stronger, braver, richer, more honoured of God and men.

And Lot went to the city and pitched his tent toward Sodom—moved it as far as Sodom; by-and-by exchanged it for a house there; sat in its place of public gathering with complacency, his righteous soul less vexed than formerly with its ungodly conversation, and left it on compulsion with regret. He is forced to share the humiliation and loss of its plundering, loses his goods with those of other citizens, is taken captive, and at length flees the city with haste and empty-handed. What he had looked upon as a very garden of the Lord he sees only as the smoke of a furnace; becomes a cave-dweller and is last heard of, a drunken and dishonoured outcast.

On the side of Divine interposition it is no less striking. Lot makes the shrewd choice,

as he thinks, and gets the advantage, securing for his herds the best part of the land. Abram leaves it to God, and when Lot has gone away God says to him: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward: for all the land that thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee." And Lot's fine pasture-grounds on which he had congratulated himself, and his city residence as well, go up in sulphurous smoke or down in saline floods—his only monument the pillar of salt where his wife looked back upon the home which he had chosen for her.

The example and the contrast may be extreme, but it is in the line of all experience. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. The principles taught, and the example set, by the Lord Jesus Christ do not seem at first sight to be well adapted to present success. The unpractical character of other-worldliness is often contemptuously set over against the evils of this-worldliness. But it is a great mistake. The principles of Christ are exactly adapted to this world and to this life, not to a shallow and disappointing success, but to the real attainment of all which in this world is best and most enduring. Every Abram who gives up all to follow God, God takes in hand and guides more safely than he could have gone alone. To seek God's Kingdom first, to love one's neighbour as one's self, to return good for evil, to act as though the seen things were fleeting and the unseen enduring, to let one's whole life be an illustration of faith in God and love for fellow-men—in these things lies the secret of all truest success and highest attainment.

It were as wise for the sailor to steer by the meteors, and refuse to look at the pole-star, as for a man in God's world to leave God and His law out of the account in his purposes and choices. One may gain much of what he thinks is good; he can not gain more than the whole world: but if he lose himself, he has only gained a great loss; not only the treasure, but the hand with which he grasped it.

Lot's Wife

BY REV. JONATHAN EDMONDSON, M.A.

"Remember Lot's wife."—*St. Luke xviii. 32.*

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE HISTORY OF LOT'S WIFE WHICH SHOULD BE REMEMBERED.

1. Remember the *opportunities* which she had of making her escape from the ruin which came upon her. She had the same opportunities that were afforded to Lot and her daughters; and, no doubt, might have escaped with them. She had the same portion of time that was given to them; she had sufficient strength to pursue the way to Zoar; and she had the company of her nearest and dearest friends to strengthen and encourage her. God graciously affords us time and strength to escape threatened ruin. What can we wish for, in this respect, that we have not? That our time is short, is very true; but who lays it to heart? Short as it is, were we to improve it well, we should find it abundantly sufficient. Surely we do not wish to be forced into the way of safety!

2. The repeated *warnings* given to Lot's wife should be remembered. She heard what the Divine messengers said, on their arrival in Sodom; she heard, no doubt, the commission which was given to Lot to warn his sons-in-law; she heard the very urgent exhortation given to Lot, on the morning of the overthrow, to escape for his life. The power of God to execute His awful threatenings had appeared the preceding night, in striking the polluted sons of Sodom with blindness; and that dreadful circumstance was intended both as a punishment to them, and a warning to the family of Lot. God does not suffer sinners to perish without warning. Angels may not be sent from the skies to warn every one; but there are other sufficient warnings to a careless world. Conscience warns the sinner, the Spirit of God warns him. Ministers warn him, the written Word gives him warning, his pious friends point out his danger, and repeated judgments warn him of approaching storms. Yet all these warnings are too commonly neglected. Wisdom calls, but we refuse; she stretches out her hand, but we regard her not. "At length she will laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh." Perhaps, after the present moment, we may be warned no more. The last warning will come; and, for aught we know, this may be the last.

3. Let us remember the *unbelief* of Lot's wife. Had she fully believed the awful pre-

diction of the Angels, she durst not have presumed to look back. Perhaps she thought it an idle tale, invented to frighten her and her family, especially as there were no visible appearances of an approaching storm. The blindness which fell on the Sodomites was an argument in proof of the threatened judgment; but unbelief pays little attention to argument. What men dislike, they endeavour to disbelieve. This remark will account for the great number of infidels who may be found in Christendom. They love sin in their hearts, and wish it may not be punished in a future state. This wish leads them to seek arguments *against* revelation. Their own reflections, and the reflections of other infidels, furnish them with what they choose to call argument; and now they begin to sin without remorse, and rush on without fear. Thus, a love of sin produces unbelief; and unbelief opens the flood-gates of sin and death.

4. The *love* of Lot's wife for *filthy* Sodom should be remembered. Probably she thought more about her property, relations, and friends in Sodom, than her own safety. Her looking back implied a desire to return. She had left the place: but her heart was not weaned from it. He who goes to Heaven, must be willing to give up all he has on earth. The world has a thousand charms to the natural man; but he who is spiritual is dead to all its charms.

5. Carefully remember how Lot and his wife and daughters *lingered* in Sodom. They seemed undetermined what to do. Probably she was the sole cause of that delay. Religion is either right or wrong. If it be right, let us pursue it with vigour: if it be wrong, let us oppose it with all our might. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." To be fully resolved on the subject of religion, is one-half of the conquest. Our great hindrance, from first to last, is a want of firm and unshaken resolution. Not that mere resolution can accomplish anything; but when the mind is fully resolved, Divine power is imparted, and hard things become easy, and rough paths plain. But while we trifle and linger, we are in danger. Poor Samson, by a wavering, unsettled temper, fell into the hands of a vile prostitute; and, when he was deprived of his strength, she said, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson." It is probable that the mind of Lot's wife was violently agitated by opposite principles after she left Sodom. One moment, she thought of going forward; the next, of turning back again. Who can tell the inward struggles of her heart, before she looked back? In her circumstances there was no time to trifle. The cloud of vengeance was ready to burst. The loss of a moment was a loss that could not be redeemed. And have we more time to trifle with than she had? Perhaps if we linger another moment, all may be lost for ever!

6. Again, let us remember that she *looked back*. The springs of action are in the mind. Unbelief, and a love of Sodom, produced that fatal look. The eye of the body follows the inclinations of the heart; and if the heart be not well guarded, it is vain to think of guarding the eye. To *look* is to *desire*. She desired Sodom, turned round, and fixed her eyes upon it. There was her wealth; there were her friends. To her it appeared a lovely place. She might think, "The mountain is barren, dreary, and gloomy. If Sodom must be destroyed, though I cannot think it will, let me look at it once more." It is not said she turned back, but, "She looked back"; and no doubt, if she had been spared a moment longer, her feet would have followed the desires of her soul. Sinner, how often has this been thy case? Thou hast said in thy heart, "One more look at the world, one more pleasure, one more sin, and then will I flee for my life." The man who can look at sin with pleasure, is not a true penitent: if he resolve to sin once more, he is likely to be hardened in his sin. Look at worldly pleasures, and thou art ruined: turn the eyes to better things, and thou art safe. A *look* ruined Eve, a *look* ruined Lot's wife, and a *look* may ruin thee. Only look, and thou art overcome; only look, and thou wilt rush into danger. If thou hast any idea of escaping from the world and sin, look no more.

7. Seriously remember the *end* of Lot's wife. She was doing her own work; and God proceeded to do His work. Fire descended from Heaven, and fell upon her. In a moment she lost her life. Thus the sinner perishes before God. When justice overtakes him, he has not a moment afforded for the exercise of prayer. Should this be our case, and perhaps it may, God will be clear. Slighted warning merits exemplary punishment. In that dreadful moment, when God appears clothed with terror, what would the sinner give for a short respite! How little does the world appear, how insignificant its greatness, how vain its pleasures, when the sword of justice is drawn, and the guilty sinner falls dead before the God of all the earth! Sinner, that moment will soon arrive. Heaven has doomed thy ruin, if thou remainest in thy sins. Our ruin is from ourselves,

Life and death are set before us; but we choose death. Who, then, can complain? Who can justly charge God with having ruined him? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Lastly, remember that Lot's wife was set forth as a *warning* to the world. She became a pillar of salt, and remained in that state for many ages. Josephus says, "I have seen it, and it remains at this day." There have been many awful instances of this kind. Sinners have been made examples, to deter others from sin. Such visitations, no doubt, have been merciful and gracious to the great bulk of mankind, whatever may be said of the individuals who have fallen under the Divine frowns. Sodom itself, and the cities of the plain, were made an example to after-ages. This was also the case of Pharaoh and his hosts; of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; of Jerusalem, when destroyed by the Roman army; and of many other persons and places, not mentioned in the Word of God.

II. THE ADVANTAGES WHICH MAY ARISE TO US, FROM A RECOLLECTION OF HER HISTORY.

1. Her history places before our eyes an awful instance of God's hatred of sin; and while we remember it, we should endeavour to "abstain from all appearance of evil." It shows an unawakened mind, to say of this and that evil, "There is not much harm in it." The question is not, how *much* harm there may be; but, Is there any harm at all? The wife of Lot might have argued in the same way. "What harm is there in lingering a few moments? What harm in looking back? Who will be injured by it?" Sin, however small, is hateful to God. We may plead for it; but He will punish it. He cannot view it with approbation: it is hateful in His sight. But why is it hateful to Him? Because it is something which should not be. All His laws are founded in wisdom and goodness; they are fit and right; and they have a direct tendency to promote His glory, and the happiness of men. Human legislators may hate the transgression of laws which are calculated to injure men, because their wisdom is called in question, and their designs frustrated. But the laws of the Lord are wise and good; and whatsoever is opposed to them is hateful in itself. Let this be remembered, that every man who pretends to wisdom and goodness may abhor iniquity. We cannot point out one moral law of God but what is absolutely necessary; nor can we point out one transgression but what is hurtful to the transgressor, and to all who are within the reach of its influence.

2. We learn by this short history, that *one relation cannot save another*. They may advise, exhort, warn, comfort, and encourage one another; but unless a person uses the means himself, no power can save him. It is a melancholy sight to see families divided on a subject of such importance as that of religion. What a painful reflection, that those who are the nearest related to each other, by the ties of nature, may be finally separated in the world to come! Nor is there any remedy for this, unless each individual takes an active part in the work which God has given all to do. Lot and his daughters were safe in Zoar, while the unhappy wife and mother perished on the plains. O, let us not depend on pious relations! We may, even while living in sin, receive many blessings on their account; but these blessings have their limits. Beyond certain bounds, mercy will not reach us on their account. Let every one think of his own personal safety. Let every one flee from ruin, let every one hasten to the mount of God. If our relations be inclined to go with us, we shall rejoice, and render them every assistance in our power; if they will not, let us leave them behind, and go alone. If they will not be saved with us, let us resolve not to perish with them.

3. By remembering Lot's wife, we shall be convinced, that a *good beginning* in religion is not sufficient to secure our happiness in a future state. Many who are now in hellish despair, once began well, but they were hindered. Perhaps they had a saving interest in Christ, but they forsook Him, and returned no more. When we take up worldly business, we expect in a short time to lay it down; but when we take up religion, we have an eye to eternity, and we should never lay it down. Lot's wife gained nothing by leaving Sodom. The backslider gains nothing by his former experience and practice, when he looks back to the world. To give up religion after a time, and to turn back to the beggarly elements of the world, is folly which cannot be described. Yet there are many of this class. Almost every place, where the Gospel has been preached, abounds with persons who have looked back. There are some, even in the visible Church, who have looked back. They began well, they now retain the form, but their hearts are gone from God. Their religion is lost, the crown is fallen from their head, and the pleasures of religion are exchanged for the pleasures of the world. Unhappy souls! It would have been better for them to have lost all the wealth of this perishing world, and even life itself, than to have lost their religion!

4. A remembrance of this history will teach us the need of being *in earnest* in the duties of religion. Lot's wife lingered on the plains of Sodom. O fatal delusion! How truly may we say, "No room for mirth or trifling here!" Destruction is behind us; but safety is before us. Let us flee for our lives. But what will our careless professors say to this? A trifier in religion is a reproach to his profession, and a grief to the pious! God frowns upon him; his conscience torments him; and punishments await him! This disposition in worldly affairs is hateful and ruinous: how much more so in religious affairs! If there be any cause on earth which requires firmness and ardour, it is that of religion. On this, our all depends in both worlds. He who trifles, discovers ignorance, wickedness, and all that is base and vile. O be fully resolved; call forth all your powers, and exert all your might. Run swiftly; do not linger on the plain; but let every moment, as it comes, find you nearer Heaven. Soon your race will end! Eternity is just at hand! The world where you will live for ever, will soon open to your view. Is danger nothing to you? Is safety nothing to you? Is religion unimportant? Satan is busy; men are busy: let the Christian be busy; and may God help him in his work!

5. While we remember Lot's wife, we shall see the necessity of *perseverance* in religion. Let us never harbour a thought of turning back. We set out at first, with a determination to find our way to Heaven. Let us never stop till we arrive there. Difficulties may be found in the way; but God will help us through them all. If we tire in the way, we lose the Heavenly crown, and sink into everlasting ruin. Perhaps we are more than half the way: a few more steps may end our journey. Heaven is full in view, and its lovely gates will soon open to receive our immortal spirits. Say in your hearts, "We will never give up our Heavenly inheritance." Let wealth, pleasure, friends, and even life go; but never let religion go. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Isaac

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"Abraham called the name of his son . . . Isaac."—Genesis xxi. 3.

In the cave of Machpelah there are still to be seen six cenotaphs of the patriarchs of Israel and their wives. There are the monuments of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; of Sarah, of Rebekah, and of Leah. Of these there is one larger and more imposing than the others. Were we asked to say beforehand which this is, probably the universal voice would be—Abraham's, the father of the faithful. And if, on being told that this was not so, we were asked again to select a name, probably we should all imagine it must be Jacob's, and give as our reason that he was the second father of the race, from whom they took the name of Israel. There are few who do not receive with surprise the tidings that the most important of the monuments of Machpelah, in outward appearance, is that of Isaac. And the surprise increases when we learn that among the Jews there has always been an undercurrent of feeling to the same effect, and that for the name of Isaac they reserve their greatest honours and their deepest reverence. Why this should be we can give no account. But it is certain that of the three patriarchs, and indeed of all characters in the Old Testament, Isaac is made in the New the most striking type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His is a beautiful and suggestive name—"Isaac"—"*laughter*," and was given to commemorate the two laughings which took place at the promise of God, the laughing of the father's joy and the laughing of the mother's incredulity, which, however, soon passed into penitence and faith (Gen. xxi. 6). He was the child of the covenant—"I will establish My covenant *with him*": the covenant which God had already made with his father, sealed with the blood of sacrifice—of the heifer, goat, ram, turtle-dove, and pigeon—that "in the seed of Abraham all the families of the earth were to be blessed." To the three patriarchs in succession that covenant was specifically given: to Abraham, when he was called to leave Chaldea (Gen. xii. 3); to Isaac, when he remained in Caanan during the famine (Gen. xxvi. 4); to Jacob, at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 14). Isaac was the first to inherit it.

And to him God gave the whole inheritance of Abraham. The flocks and herds, of

which Eliezer spoke so eloquently (Gen. xxiv. 35), were the first fruits and the earnest. But the land of promise, which was Abraham's, not in possession, but in promise only: the undivided land, from Dan to Beersheba, was to be Isaac's. There was indeed another, and an older son, to whom the father was tenderly attached (Gen. xvii. 18): but he was not to be heir; he was not even to have a share of his father's property. This was the reason for that transaction which seems on the surface so hard, and in some of its details was so hard—the casting out of Ishmael and his mother. It was Sarah's doing, much to Abraham's grief; but God's hand and purpose were in it, to keep the inheritance unbroken, and to give it all to Isaac. "The son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman" (Gal. iv. 30). "To thee will I give it." "He saith not, And to *seeds*, as of many, but as of one, And to *thy seed*" (Gal. iii. 16). Isaac was to have it all.

Concerning the first part of his life we have no record. What he was as a boy and a lad we know not: save that we infer that he early became God's child in heart and life, from what took place thereafter. We do not learn from Scripture the age of Isaac when the burnt-offering on Mount Moriah took place. The belief of the Jews, as stated by Josephus, is, that he was twenty-five years old; and with this the narrative is in perfect accord. There comes first in order of events the marriage of Ishmael (Gen. xxi. 21), who was but fourteen years older than Isaac; then there is the story of Abraham in "the Philistines' land," where he "sojourned many days" (xxi. 34); and "*after these things*" (xxii. 1.) comes the call of God for the sacrifice of his son. The whole circumstances, therefore, answer to the Jewish tradition that Isaac was in the prime of youthful vigour, twenty-five years old; and Abraham consequently a hundred and twenty-five. That Isaac was strong is to be inferred from the fact that the burden of carrying "the wood" was laid upon him.

The importance of this is that the sacrifice could not have taken place *without Isaac's own consent*. We have grown so accustomed to speak of it as "Abraham's sacrifice" that we too often reserve all our feeling for him, and leave Isaac out of account. But whatever the sacrifice was for the father, it was certainly not less for the son: Abraham's *heart* was lacerated; but Isaac's *life* was in question.

Must it not have been true that Isaac gave consent? To have put a young man to death by force, had that been possible, who was guilty of no crime; to have dragged him, an unwilling, resisting, shrieking victim to the altar and the knife, uttering prayers and cries with tears to be spared: does any man form that picture to his own mind as a representation of what Moriah was? And in such a case could any one have seen in Isaac a type of Him Who "*gave Himself*" for us? Besides all which there is the obvious consideration, that in such a possible struggle for life, and with such a stake in it, the young man of twenty-five was not likely to be overcome by one whose years numbered one hundred more.

It is clear, then, in every respect, as we think of it, that the consent of Isaac is the very kernel of the story and of his character. When father and son reached the top of the hill of Moriah, the former had before him the task of explaining God's demand as to "the lamb" to be provided for the sacrifice; and the latter had to say whether he would meet the demand of God. A wondrous and solemn moment! In Heaven a Father and a Son were looking down upon the scene, listening to every word! And when Isaac arose and said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God!" and offered himself, he could also say, "No man taketh my life from me: I lay it down of myself!" In that one definite act he did surrender himself, fully, to God. He became "obedient unto death." In that moment of surrender he already "*tasted death*."

And from that day, Isaac was the dedicated one, and lived a new life, as we may trace in all his story.

He had been on the altar of God: placed there with his own consent: and there is no taking back what has been thus given over to God. "The altar sanctifieth the gift." And what is thus "devoted" or "consecrated" men may not touch again as theirs: that is robbing God; it is the sin of Achan; the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. Isaac's life was the property of God: he was "not his own": and nothing was his own thereafter.

Nay, Isaac left his old life behind; he *had died* on Mount Moriah; and henceforth he lived a *resurrection-life*. In him first we see the type presented of one who "died with Christ," and "rose again from the dead." Literally, this was almost true; spiritually, it was entirely so. When he gave himself up to die, and when, in pursuance of his

"surrender," which was no mere word, he was bound, and lay waiting for the end, and the very knife was raised to sacrifice him, he did, in that moment, *die*. Henceforth he "reckoned himself dead indeed" to all past life, and its interests: he was now "alive unto God." And "the life which he now lived in the flesh he lived by faith": he had been "crucified with Christ."

All through his life he dwelt softly, and abode in the fear of God. So much had this impressed his son Jacob, that he swore by "THE FEAR of his father Isaac" (Gen. xxxi. 53), and on another occasion he calls God by this very name—"The God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac." Not the slave's fear, for he who faces death has done with that: but in daily life he walked in so calm, reverential, and holy a spirit as to make the presence of God felt by those who were around him. He had seen Heaven opened: he had been so near God, on the altar, that he could not take his eyes away. "*The Fear of Isaac!*" *It was the family name for God.*

Then how beautiful is Isaac as a son! Sarah the princess is not always, to our conception, the most loveable of women: she could be imperious, and she could be harsh. But this was in the interest of her child. There is many a woman who is little known to her rivals or her equals, but whose wonderful tenderness is revealed to her son. And we stay the word of criticism about Sarah, as we remember how the Holy Ghost makes her a type of the "holy women." So, too, we mark with deepening interest how she was loved and mourned by Isaac. Old as she was, when like a shock of corn fully ripe she was gathered in,—for she dropped into the grave at the age of a hundred and twenty-seven years,—yet she was deeply mourned. For it was only when Rebekah came into his tent, and the wife took the mother's place, that "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

We can see the same surrendered spirit in the story of his marriage. Isaac is the only one of the patriarchs who had but one wife; and she was taken only after Sarah had departed. And in the choice of that wife he is content to be passive, allowing God to choose for him. For it was evidently God who was choosing, not Abraham, not Eliezer, not blind chance or fortune, as men speak. This is clear in every verse of that ancient idyll, one of the most beautiful in all literature, which tells of the courtship of the daughter of Laban, and is well summed up in the words, "The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good." And as he had committed the matter to the Lord at the beginning, so he waits on the Lord about it to the end. The caravan, as it nears home, finds him in the fields "praying" (Gen. xxiv. 63, *margin*); once more putting himself into the Lord's hands, and waiting to see what the Lord will send. It is a life of consecration indeed.

There are blots on this beautiful character, no doubt, as there are on that of all the children of God. The thread of insincerity and deceitfulness, already seen in Abraham, so clearly interwoven with the character of Jacob, and still found in the people of the East as their besetting sin, can at least be traced in the patriarch of Gerar. He surprises us, too, by that love for "savoury food," which seems an alien thing in a man so still and calm, lord of his passions and himself. And in the matter of Esau and the blessing, he cannot be supposed to be ignorant of the solemn communication which had come from God at the birth of the twins, nor acquitted of rebellion against the Lord's purpose in setting aside the elder and favourite son. These things we must sorrowfully admit, and frankly chronicle as imperfections and stains. But let us remember gladly how in the dim light of those early days he did so largely serve God; how he was the only patriarch who did not leave Canaan during famine, but abode in Gerar during those hard days, because the Lord commanded him to remain. In that very year of famine he sowed: and next year reaped "an hundredfold" (Gen. xxvi. 12). He lived then in obedience and in blessing. And when the plot against him succeeded, and he had given the birthright to Jacob in his ignorance, with most perfect loyalty he accepted and confirmed it when he knew. "I have blessed him; yea, and he *shall* be blessed."

Let us also carry in remembrance that he long lived under the greatest physical loss which can fall upon an old man. At the time of Jacob's deceit and blessing, Isaac seemed to be dying, at the age, as we gather from Jacob's history of a hundred and thirty years. But he did not die then. He seems to have outlived Rebekah, and lived to be a hundred and eighty years old. (Gen. xxxv. 28). But at the earlier period his eyes had already failed; he "was old, and his eyes were dim" (xxvii. 1), so that he could not distinguish one son from the other. We conclude that they continued so, not getting better as he grew older; so that for fifty years Isaac was *blind*. Sad and pitiful lot for

God's chosen one! How far may we see in that long continuance of so great an affliction one of the results of his rebellion against God in the matter of Jacob's blessing? What a train of evils followed that day of deceit! Jacob, forced to flee from his father's house for his life, lest Esau should fulfil his threat. Rebekah, losing the son of her affection, probably dying before his return, and so never seeing him again. Esau, marrying an Ishmaelite, and living in Seir, far away from Gerar. Isaac, losing both sons, then bereaved of his wife; a blind man for fifty years, and for twenty of those years alone. Ah! when the saint falls, God makes him an example for many. When Adam sinned, he was cast out from Paradise. When Moses sinned at Meribah, he was kept out of the Holy Land. And Isaac, blind Isaac, beautiful and still soul, though, like us all, imperfect, treads the Holy Land, but sees it no more. Moses sees, but does not possess: Isaac possesses, but does not see.

Isaac

BY REV. STOPFORD A. BROOKE, LL.D.

"Isaac gave up the ghost," etc.—Genesis xxxv. 29.

The lives of Abraham and Jacob are as attractive as the life of Isaac is apparently unattractive. The former has supplied materials for historians, preachers, and moralists, the latter has been left comparatively untouched. The reason of this is that the character of Isaac had few salient features. It had no great faults, it had no striking virtues; it was not boldly outlined like that of Abraham, which stands forth as chiselled by Michael Angelo; it was not full of sharp and unexpected angles like that of Jacob; it is the quietest, smoothest, most silent character in the Old Testament. I might say that it was also the deepest, were it not that Isaac was weak, and the profoundest depths of character are due to strength of will.

And it is owing to this that there are so few remarkable events in the life of Isaac, for the remarkableness of events is created by the character which meets them. If Abraham's character had descended to his son, Isaac's history would have been a chequered one. Only see how Jacob's ambitious, scheming, pushing temperament made his life a continual scene of change.

Again, the character of Isaac was contemplative. Whatever were his spiritual struggles, they went on unseen in the hermitage of his own breast. None had ever sounded the depths of his feeling or his thought. He possessed the sadness which accompanies sensitiveness and reserve, and it is touching to feel how his life contradicted the meaning of his name. But it was no passionate melancholy. No bitter grief, no wild agony of wrestling with God, no moments of overwhelming doubt of God's justice passed over the quiet lake of Isaac's soul, brooding ever much upon itself. Such men make but little outward impression. The world does not care to read a character which does not express itself in action. Isaac's history has been neglected.

I make one more remark in introduction.

It seems to be a law that all national, social, and personal life should advance by alternate expansions and contractions. The wave of progress recedes before it rises higher on the strand. After a revolution, a few years of national repose occur before the people settle down into the new order; after a reformation, a general weariness of the subjects most insisted upon during the years of reform; after a crisis in a man's personal life, a period of stillness. Exhausted energies claim rest before they can recover sufficiently to push forward on a fresh career.

We meet this law, as we may call it, here. A great and new impulse had entered history when Abraham went forth to Canaan. Full of a sublime purpose, endowed with fiery energy and quickness of resolution, Abraham pushed the world forward. Pervading all his qualities was a deep and simple faith in God, which producing a stern sense of duty and an unquestioning obedience, knit together all his energies into a life for God, and made the impulse which he gave the world religious.

Now characters strong in action, and strong in suffering, seem to exhaust for a time the activity as well as the capability of pain possible to any family. There are but few instances where a great father has had a son who equalled him in greatness. The

old power more often re-appears in Jacob than in Isaac. The spirit of Abraham's energy passed over his son to his son's son.

We ask, first, what were the circumstances which formed the character of Isaac?

He was an only son. Ishmael had been banished soon after his birth. He lived without any youthful companions. It was natural that he should become the sober, sensitive, silent child.

Again, Isaac's parents were both very old. Thus an atmosphere of antique quiet hung around his life. There was in Abraham's tent, when the boy began to open his questioning eyes upon the world, an evening air of finished life, of silent waiting for the great change, of peaceful victory over trials, of calm repose upon the memory of an active past. This also subtly influenced the character of Isaac.

Again, these two old hearts lived for him alone. On him the pent-up parental love of many, many years was outpoured. His youth was sheltered as much as his childhood from the rough winds of life. Surrounded by the infinite delicacy of the experienced tenderness of old age—a tenderness doubly tender from the great shock it had suffered on Mount Gerizim—Isaac grew up to manhood.

So was moulded the man of thought and gentleness, while the man, like Jacob, of active and stormy life, was formed for his work by the struggle at home with Esau, was tried by the favouritism of his father, and sent out at last in loneliness to fight single-handed the battle of existence.

These, in brief, were the early influences which built up the character of Isaac. It is a character difficult to define, appearing far more from the absence than from the presence of things said and done; but we shall find his excellences and his faults exemplified in his life.

I. THE EXCELLENCES OF HIS CHARACTER.

1. The first scene in which Isaac appears is on the ascent to Mount Gerizim. Both old man and young went up the slope alone. Isaac kept silence. Once only, as he laded himself with the fire and wood, did he question, "Where is the lamb?" etc. He must have seen the trouble in his father's eyes, he must have noticed the constraint of manner, the signs of suppressed and mysterious sorrow, and there may have flashed upon his heart with a shock of horrible pain a thought familiar then to dwellers in Canaan, the thought of human sacrifice. Was Abraham victimless, because *he* was the victim? Yet he was still, and spoke no word. His trust in his father was entire. We read of no struggle, of no unmanly prayers, only of the submissive self-surrender in obedience unto death, because what Abraham willed was also the will of Isaac.

In this he was a noble type indeed of Christ. Isaac, in the highest moment perhaps of his whole life, shadowed forth the perfect sacrifice of Him Who was all that Isaac could not be.

Christian brethren, if you cannot in your life, as these old patriarchs did, typify Christ before He came, revealing glimpses of the perfect Man to come, you can make Him manifest now to men by setting your existence to the music of His Life. Oh! if God calls you, as He may, to give up youth, love, fame, noble prospects, as Abraham called on Isaac, then do so in Isaac's spirit—silent submission, un murmuring obedience, deep faith that your Father loves you and knows best.

2. The next excellence of the character of Isaac was his tender constancy. It arose out of, or at least was deeply coloured by, the peculiar quietude of his temperament. It is exemplified in the story of his mother's death and of his marriage. He was forty years old when Sarah passed away. We should imagine that Isaac would not feel this loss much, for there could be little in common between a son and a mother separated by an interval of ninety years of age. But the habitudes of life to a man like Isaac are strong as iron chains, and the forcible severing of one of them makes him feel rudderless and adrift. His grief was not violent but deep, deep from the natural constancy of a silent heart. He could not bear the clamour of the encampment, it was intrusive; he could not bear the sight of the tent in the evening when his mother used to welcome him, for it made him sadly conscious of a great want. Above all things, a character like his demanded female sympathy. Deprived of his mother's love, he wandered out to the fields when the glow of the setting sun had reddened all the sky, and drew into his soul calm from the peacefulness of eventide. Then he confided to the great Mother and to God the sorrow which could not speak, the hopes which thrilled him when he thought of Eliezer's mission. One evening, as he walked, he saw the

camels draw near from the eastward; he turned, and found the answer to his prayer in the sympathy which filled with tears the eyes of Rebekah.

We are not told that he married a second wife. Of all the patriarchs he alone had tender constancy enough never to need any other solace than the first affection of his manhood. He alone represented to the Jewish nation the ideal of true marriage. He is the only Hebrew in the Bible who appears to share in a more northern type of character. Nay, there is, even in his constancy to the memory of his mother and to his wife, something of the coolness of a man whose passions were not capable of storm. There was no eastern violence in his grief; nothing can be quieter than the way he takes his marriage. Abraham seems to manage the whole thing for him: he allows a servant to choose his wife; he takes no visible interest in the embassy to Haran. A man, apparently, who would rather let events come and find him, and then be contented with them, than one who would either seek for events or lead them; a man whose constancy was a natural instinct rather than a virtue; who once put into any position, such as marriage, would stay there and not feel the energy which might make the position so wearisome as to lead him to desire a change.

3. Of this kind also was his piety. It was as natural to him as to a woman to trust and love; not strongly, but constantly, sincerely. From his earliest years, through his still and dependent character, he received unquestioning his father's God and rested his heart upon the Lord. His trust became the habit of his soul. His days were knit each to each by natural piety. He had no doubt, no dark hours of passionate prayer, no fervent agony of soul. We may too much neglect him on account of this, for the strong man who has been brought close to God out of desperate struggle is more interesting, because apparently more heroic, than a tranquil man who has known the Heavenly Father from his youth. But we are much mistaken in our neglect. To have unquestioning faith is the highest blessedness of man, and many a poor woman and illiterate man who have never doubted, because they have never lived in the spirit of the world; never had any ecstasy in forgiveness because they have never sinned deeply, are far nearer Heaven than a man like Jacob. To have served God simply, calmly, unbrokenly, like Isaac, is indeed blessed. It is not without comfort and relief that we turn from the grandeur of Abraham's long life-contest, and from the slow, tempestuous, sorrowful growth of Jacob's religion, to the secluded, restful, continuous religious life of Isaac. Many a Jew, in after times, who could never have reached the height of Abraham's life, who could not sympathize with the burning force of Isaiah's heart, or with the impassioned sorrow of Jeremiah, must have looked back and found repose in contemplating the still valley of existence where the religion of Isaac worshipped and advanced. And many a Christian now, who perhaps thinks himself not so near to God as his friend, because he does not feel his struggle or his ecstasy of soul, may find in Isaac the prototype of his own life, and know that God is with him as He was with Isaac. It is true, it is a moment of rapture when one who has been worldly, sinful, thoughtless, like Jacob, finds his God at last; but it is more blessed still when a man can have, like Isaac, the thought that he has grown naturally, like a flower, from youth to manhood, into the likeness of the Heavenly Father.

II. THE FAULTS OF THE CHARACTER OF ISAAC.

I have said of him that he was a man who would rather let events come and find him, than seek for or lead events. There had descended to him nothing of the lightning-like activity of Abraham, who, to rescue his relation and to vindicate a wrong, pursued all night in a forced march, surprised, and routed the army of the four kings. Isaac was slow, indifferent, inactive. We find this exemplified in the story of the wells. (Gen. xxvi. 18—22.)

There are times, and this was one of them, when war is necessary. Good, fair fighting is the only way to cut some knots and to settle some questions; and at such times the anything-for-peace party do this evil especially—they sacrifice the welfare of the future to their ease in the present.

This is exactly what Isaac was now doing. It was all-important for Abraham's family that they should be respected by the Canaanites. If they lost their reputation for bravery and for defence of their own rights, they would be treated as the weak are treated; one by one they would have perished, and the nation of Israel had never been. In these circumstances Isaac should not have given way.

But this is not Christian; we are told joyfully to suffer wrongs. I answer, first, that those were not Christian times; and secondly, that even if they had been so, the founder

of a nation or the ruler of a tribe is not bound by the same rules of conduct as an Apostle, though he is bound by the same principles. Their work is different. If a settler in the backwoods were to allow Indians to cut his corn with impunity, it would not be long before his whole household would be slaughtered, and such a contempt created among the Indians for his fellow-settlers, that they in turn would suffer. There would be nothing Christian in that conduct; for though a man ought to forgive an injury, he must also defend public law; though he may give way on a personal point, as Abraham did to Lot, when no interests but his own were involved, he must not give way when the interests of others are engaged.

It is the mistake of such characters as Isaac, that they take a kind of pride in their willingness to forgive and their readiness to suffer wrong, and call this Christian, when in reality it is a want of power to feel a just indignation, and the desire to lead an undisturbed life, which are the reasons for their apparent self-surrender. The error of this impassiveness is great, for it entails misfortune on others who do feel acutely, and who have to bear the burden and heat of the injury. Isaac sat still in his tent while his herdsmen fought his battles for him; and when the noise became importunate upon his dainty meditation, gave way, left the place, and brought double trouble upon his people. All he wanted was tranquillity; he did not think of the comfort of others.

The same weakness, ending in selfishness, appears again in the history of Isaac's lie to Abimelech. Into the critical question about the repetition of the same story in Abraham's and Isaac's life, I do not enter. But looked at in contrast with Isaac's fearless silence when at the point of death under the knife of Abraham, this fear of being slain is curious as a mental problem.

The solution may be this. Isaac's character would lead him to acquiesce in the inevitable. Let him once know that death was certain, and he could die bravely; but he quailed before the imagination of death. So, provided he could escape from the haunting fear which, because it kept him in suspense, disturbed the even tenor of his life, he would not shrink from a lie, especially as it wore the aspect of a truth. Many of the greatest temptations of these sensitive and unpractical characters arise from the predominance of imagination over the will and the conscience. It is not only conscience which doth make cowards of us all. Isaac yielded to an imagined fear, and lied.

It is one of the melancholy results of a false view of Bible history and of inspiration that commentators are driven to immoral shifts and shuffling, in order to whiten over the dark spots in the lives of the Old Testament saints. We are told by one who should have known better, "that Isaac did right to evade the difficulty as long as he could lawfully, and to wait and see if God would interpose." This is quite miserable. A lie is a lie, and the lie of Isaac was a very shameful lie. It was the cowardice of involving his wife in possible dishonour that he might save his own life; it was throwing, by a deceit, the whole burden of a difficulty upon the shoulders of a woman.

Look at its results. Isaac had, so to speak, accredited deception within his household. Let fear drive you to swerve from honour; lie like Isaac to gain your point, if you will, but do not wonder afterwards if your son prefers his life to his honour, the "blessing of prosperity" to the sacred rights of truth, to the welfare of a brother, and to the peace of a father's heart. It is your punishment, not arbitrary, but natural. Plant a lie in your life, and some bitter winter day you will have to eat its fruit.

In one other way the weakness which arose from Isaac's easiness of character manifested itself; in the division between his sons. He took no pains to harmonize Jacob and Esau with one another. He fell into the fault of meditative men, of men who live in their own world of thought; the fault of letting things take their course, lest interference should disturb him. Hence the curse of favouritism prevailed in his tent. Every one can see that Esau's character was a reaction from his father's, and for this very reason—that Isaac saw in his eldest son the qualities of daring and activity which he had not—he loved him most. He admired the bold hunter; he looked down on Jacob, who dwelt smoothly in the tent, in whom he saw his own faults modified or magnified. Hence arose a further division between Isaac and Rebekah. The woman adopted the cause of the neglected son, and practised with him against her husband and her eldest born. It is a sad spectacle. It is more; it is a solemn warning to the parents of this congregation. Look to it, I say, that laziness of contemplation and love of ease do not end in injustice, and injustice end in a household divided against itself; in an alienated wife, a son whose brave heart is turned to gall and revenge, another who goes forth into the world to cheat and shuffle and compromise, and only after long and weary pilgrimage to find rest at

last in truth. It is wretched to think how many a home is ruined, as Isaac's was, by the fear of falsehood, sloth or favouritism, of a parent.

There is one more accusation usually made against Isaac—his love of savoury meat. But I do not speak of this so much as a fault as a natural consequence of his temperament and mode of life. An inactive man who has but little enjoyment in outdoor exercise, or who, as we may suppose was the case with Isaac, allows himself to be so mastered by a physical misfortune, such as blindness, as always to keep his couch, very often becomes a slave to his appetites. Their gratification supplies him with the stimulus which an energetic man would derive from work. It is curious to see that Isaac seemed to have needed this stimulus prior to any mental exercise of foresight or will. This need, this pitiable love of savoury things, which seems never to have degenerated into gluttony, is quite in accordance with his general character. It only teaches us the great lesson that the body revenges itself for neglect of its laws. If we will not take healthy impulses from physical exercise towards the work of the brain and of the spirit, we must supply their place by unhealthy expedients, for man cannot live without some stimulus or other. We substitute our own way for God's way, we run counter to the universe, and we reap what we have sown in our body, and the body disturbs the mind, and the mind the spirit, and we are all unhinged. Let the man who spends a dreamy, sedentary, idle life beware lest he drop into a querulous old age, and end in becoming a mere lover of savoury meat.

III. IF THE FAULTS OF ISAAC WERE GREAT, YET HIS EXCELLENCES ON THE WHOLE WERE GREATER.

One sorrowful day, the day of his son's deceit, he saw what his weakness had done. He seems to me to have then looked in the face the fault of his whole character, and repented of it. I say this because I cannot otherwise account for the accession of strength which his character and the clear insight which his mind seem suddenly to have gained. It required strength of will to hold fast to the blessing he had pronounced on Jacob in spite of the passionate grief of his best-loved son. It required great insight, in spite of his own favouritism of the one and of the deceit of the other, to recognise beneath what was base in his younger son a higher character than that of Esau. From this moment I date the redemption of Isaac's character from his faults. He was left alone, and for many years we hear no more of the good old man. But we catch a last glimpse of him, and it is a happy one. To him, dwelling at Hebron, came his son Jacob, rich, blessed of God, with a goodly train of sons. And as Isaac saw the youths, he felt that the promise of Abraham's God was fulfilled. He saw himself the father of many nations. His heart rejoiced in the future glory of his people.

Then came the last scene of this silent life. Beside his dying bed stood both his sons, reconciled to one another. His death united in love those whom his weakness and favouritism had separated. The scars of his life were healed. God was good to him, and gave him rest. Brightness was round the old man's head, and peace in the old man's heart, when death came tenderly and gathered Isaac to his fathers.

Isaac

BY REV. J. HILES HITCHENS.

"Abraham called the name of his son . . . Isaac."—Genesis xxi. 3.

The careers of men greatly vary according to the positions in which Providence may place them, and the diverse temperaments with which God has endowed them. Some live for *public* service, and seem designed, like the oak or the poplar, to be conspicuous in the forest of the world. Others court retirement, and seem, like the modest violet, adapted only to shed sweet odour in shady nooks. Some delight in deeds of daring, scenes of difficulty, and are most at home when all the manliness of their nature is brought into strenuous exercise. Others find the greatest pleasure in unobtrusive attention to the quiet amenities of life. Some court the fierce light of popularity, others the gentle gleams of privacy. Some love to be abroad among men, others cling fondly to all the sweets of home.

Now Isaac was one of the latter class. He was a man of retired habits—a man of peaceful disposition—a man who yielded to the full force of domestic ties; but a man who, by the example and influence of his beautiful piety and admirable virtues, has

greatly instructed and blessed humanity. Indeed, more, that is lastingly beneficial, may be learned from the quiet career of Isaac than from the noisy, warlike, and victorious doings of most of earth's chieftains and conquerors. The study of Isaac's life leads one to say with Solomon, "Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city!"

That he was exposed to many trials in life none of us wonder. But it is worthy of notice—if as yet it has escaped our observation—that almost all his trials, certainly all the more searching, arose from his own dear kindred. There was a sense in which the patriarch's greatest foes were they of his own house. The persons who stood nearest to him by the ties of nature, were often farthest from him in sympathy. They who were most expected to be sources of comfort were too generally causes of anxiety and pain. In his very infancy he was hated and scorned by his brother; his father's act of sacrifice must have severely tested his faith; his mother's death was a bitter trial; his jealous son's struggle for superiority grieved his heart; the idolatrous marriage of Esau vexed his righteous spirit; the deception practised upon him by his wife and younger son pained his mind; while his servants' connection with powerful neighbours was an annoyance. And yet, despite all these things, how beautiful was his life and how deserving of imitation are his excellencies!

The special feature in the character of Isaac to which I desire to call your attention, is the filial obedience of the man. This, I think, may be traced on several occasions, manifesting itself most clearly and convincingly. It might be inferred from the fact that for seventy-five years of his life Isaac was most closely united to his father, and very largely under the direction and control of his parent. But I prefer to take a moment's glance at the special circumstances in his history in which the excellency is strikingly displayed.

The ever-memorable transaction of Abraham's offering his son as a sacrifice first claims notice. According to Josephus, Isaac was twenty-five years of age when the strange and staggering command was given by Heaven, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Without hesitation, strong in faith and supremely desirous of pleasing God, Abraham rose early in the morning and made all necessary arrangements for the journey. Having called Isaac and summoned two of his young men to attend them, they started out for the spot, in the land of Moriah, that the Lord had chosen. At his age, Isaac was conversant with the rites and ceremonies of his religion, and knew well the manner in which expiation was made for sin. He was fully aware that animals were sacrificed, and the blood of bulls and goats shed. Seeing, therefore, that they were conveying with them all that was necessary except the victim, it is most natural to suppose that the mind of the young man was much exercised as to the intention of his parent. But not a word is recorded till father and son alone are ascending the mountain side. Then the son addressed to his parent one of the most trying questions ever propounded, "Behold the fire and the wood: where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" "If," says Bishop Hall, "Abraham's heart could have known how to relent, that question of his dear, innocent, and pious son had melted it into compassion. I know not whether that word, 'My father,' did not strike Abraham as deep as the knife of Abraham could strike his son." The answer was evasive—"My son, God will provide Himself a lamb." Isaac accepted the reply as sufficient. He had been trained to trust in, reverence, and defer to his father. He was confident that Abraham would neither do nor say aught that was hasty or imprudent. Hence, with thorough acquiescence, he continued the journey. When the spot was reached an altar was reared, the wood was laid thereon, and then the intention of the father was disclosed to the son. The sacred penman had passed over in silence the sad scene which then ensued; but the Jewish historian, Josephus, records a conversation which passed between the two. Abraham says, "Oh, my son, begged of God in a thousand prayers, and at length unexpectedly obtained; ever since you were born, with what tenderness and solicitude have I brought you up! proposing to myself no higher felicity than to see you become a man, and to leave you the heir of my possessions. But the God Who bestowed you upon me demands you again. Prepare to yield the sacrifice with alacrity. I give you up to Him Who at all seasons and in all situations has prosecuted us with loving-kindness and tender mercy. You came into the world under the necessity of dying, and the manner of your death is to be singular and illustrious, presented in sacrifice by your own father to the great Father of all Who, we may presume, considers it as unfit and unbecoming that you

should depart out of this life by disease, in war, or by any other of the usual calamities to which human nature is subject, but Who waits to receive your spirit, departing amidst the prayers and vows of your affectionate parent, that He may place it in perfect blessedness with Himself. *There* you shall still be the consolation and support of my old age—not, indeed, by your presence and conversation, but bequeathing me, when you depart, the presence and blessing of the Almighty.” Then Isaac is recorded as replying with cheerfulness in these words: “I should be unworthy of life were I capable of showing reluctance to obey the will of my father and my God. It were enough for me that my *earthly parent alone* called me to the altar; how much more when my Heavenly Father redemands His own?” Isaac then submitted to be bound. It must have been a voluntary surrender to his father’s will, for we cannot suppose it possible that an old man of 125 years of age could have bound a young man of twenty-five years, in the very fulness of life and energy, unless the youth had consented. It was not the superior strength of the father, nor so much the authority of the parent, that prevailed to bring everything to the crisis. It was the filial obedience, the beautiful, child-like confidence in and reverence for the father on Isaac’s part. By Divine interposition, you know, the life of so dutiful and pious a son was spared. But one cannot read the whole narrative without seeing that the faith of Isaac is shown as well as that of Abraham. The obedience of the son was as prompt as that of the father. If praise be accorded Abraham for his resignation, equal praise is due to Isaac for his thorough submission. Happy is the father who has such a son! Aye, thrice happy is the son who so reverences and obeys his father! How few young men of the present day would have done as Isaac did! How many would have ridiculed the purposes, spurned the entreaties, and repudiated the plans of the venerable patriarch! How many would rather have forgone all prospect of present and future peace with relatives and friends than submit to such requests as those made to Isaac!

The Jewish Rabbins, who abound in legendary stories, tell us that the devil, who had exulted in the prospect of seeing Isaac fall a prey to the knife of his father, was filled with vexation at his disappointment; and that to revenge himself he caused the death of Sarah, by conveying to her intelligence to the effect that her beloved son was actually slain. There is no necessity to have recourse to such a legend to explain the decease of the mother of Isaac. She was 127 years of age, and it is no marvel at such a period if nature sank beneath the weight of days. But the death of Sarah was a sore trial to both the husband and the son. Isaac cherished that mother with pious attention during her life. Her knee had been an altar for his prayers, a desk for his lessons, a tribunal for his faults. Her arms had been a city of refuge in his juvenile calamities. Her voice had been music to his heart, to quell the rising of evil passion, and charm away the spirit of gloom. On her heart Isaac’s name had been more deeply engraven than was the name of either tribe upon the breastplate of the high priest. The love of that fond mother was reciprocated by Isaac. He was content to live beneath the parental roof, and share in the happiness of home so long as that mother lived; and when she died he deeply and tenderly lamented her departure. By her death the question of Isaac’s future was brought more clearly before the mind for settlement. Isaac was at man’s estate; but such was his love for his father, and his reverence for his judgment, that he left the settlement of his future, and the management of his worldly affairs, to the wisdom and care of that surviving parent. You know how the father sent his tried and pious servant into Mesopotamia, in search of a wife for Isaac; how that devout Eliezer knelt by the well-side, and in earnest prayer invoked the interposition and guidance of Heaven; how Rebekah, beautiful, and young, and energetic, and kind, was chosen; how she was introduced to Isaac, who had gone out into the fields to meditate at eventide; how they were united in wedlock, and how it is written, “Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.” The interval between that dear parent’s demise and Isaac’s marriage was three years. Such was the fondness he entertained for his mother that throughout that period he cherished all those mournful and tender regrets which would naturally spring up in the bosom of one characterised by such devoted filial affection. Not till *three* years after the mother’s burial do we read of Isaac being “comforted,” and then not till Providence had provided another to take the place in his thoughts and affections which that lamented parent had occupied. The transition from a dutiful and affectionate son to a kind and indulgent husband is natural and easy. And it may be well remarked, in passing, that one of

the first and best recommendations to any young man in settling in life is that he *has been*, and *is* respectful, loving, and obedient to his parents. If I were advising any young woman meditating the propriety of accepting a marriage offer, I should say *on no account* encourage the attentions of a young man who speaks contemptuously of his parents, or acts toward them with evident disrespect. If you marry him the day will come when he will treat you the same as he treats the first and nearest relative of life, and many a heart-ache will be in store for you.

Now, take these instances, together with the entire tenor of Isaac's life, and you cannot fail to see how beautiful was his filial obedience. With his parents he dwelt contentedly and obediently at home till he had attained the age of manhood. To his father's requests he willingly submitted. To a most painful death he was ready to surrender because his father desired him so to do. Fondly loving his mother, he mourned for her three years. Then, confiding in his father, he left the arrangement of his whole career, and the marriage relationship of his life, in his hands; and even after his union with Rebekah, so long as his father lived, his father's will was his. No young man in the Scriptures stands forth as a brighter example of filial tenderness and submission. His life reprove the forwardness and self-sufficiency of so many young men of the present day. Between him and them a great gulf seems fixed. Isaac and the young man of modern times are as distant as the poles. Let me sketch one, who shall stand as a specimen of the rest; but let me express the hope that none of my dear brethren present in any way answer to the portrayal. Yonder is a youth passing from boyhood to manhood. He assumes airs which older and wiser men can easily detect as the certain indications of his emptiness and ignorance. He speaks of respected and experienced men in terms of derision. He treats his superiors in age, intelligence, wealth, and influence as if they were mere dross. He listens, not to the wise counsels of his friends, for he is vain enough to think he knows as well or better than any of them. He is desirous, though not out of his teens, to be thought independent. He is impatient of restraint, and expects to be allowed a latch-key, to enter his father's house at what hour of the night he may please. He rebels at the advice of parents. He avows that all their talk to him is the offspring of most unreasonable anxiety, or of unfounded mistrust. The more earnestly the loving parents press their views upon his attention the more resolutely he resists. Away from home he speaks of that fond mother as the "old woman," and that faithful father as the "old man," or the "old governor." He presently breaks away from the domestic hearth, and thinks to live untrammelled by parental watchfulness. Away from home, he seldom cares to write. A letter is a signal to the parents that he is wanting cash. Intimation of a parent's illness makes but slight impression on his mind. He cares not whether his course of life gives pain or pleasure to her who had his first infant kiss. He has no wish to relieve the anxiety of his beloved parents; and if the tidings of their death were conveyed to him, his first question would be, "What is bequeathed to me?" Alas! poor young man, he little knows what joys he is losing, and what a harvest of lamentations awaits him.

Now you do not, you cannot surely, admire such a character. You cannot wish such to be *your* portrait. But it is the true likeness drawn from life of not a few young men of the present day. My dear brethren, I set Isaac before you as a pattern, and beseech you to cultivate what is so conspicuous in his life—filial affection and obedience. Depend upon it, nothing is more beautiful in the character of a man than the tender and dutiful remembrance of father and mother. Next to the love of God should come the love of one's first and dearest friends. Solomon would have been a far better ruler, and a much happier man, had he heeded the advice given him by his mother, as recorded in the last chapter of the Book of Proverbs. The first commandment with promise is this—"Honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." And the noblest man that ever lived—the God-man—in Whom there was discoverable no flaw or feebleness, was subject unto His mother and reputed father. I commend to you the words of the wise man—"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother"; "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."

Gratitude to them should induce your filial obedience. Remember how they cared for you when none others would; how anxiously, night and day, they watched your health, and prayed for your preservation; remember to what inconveniences and discomforts they put themselves to secure you a good education; how unrepiningly they

expended of their limited means for your advantage; how affectionately they parted from you when you left home, and how warmly they welcomed you when you returned. Just seriously call to remembrance all their kindness to you, and surely gratitude will suggest ever doing your utmost to serve and please them. Sometimes you may think that they are unnecessarily anxious about you, and that they too often chide or caution you. Well, grant for a moment that their weakness does occasionally so betray itself; it is not a weakness to be despised. They have seen more of life than you. They have seen other sons as steady, as shrewd, as clever as you, make lamentable shipwreck. They have witnessed youths enter life, with less of self-confidence than you possess, fall from virtue's path into lamentable disgrace. Do not then despise their cautions, but rather be grateful to them, and aim to remove their fears by affectionately heeding their counsels and faithfully following them.

Some of you young men are far from home. The scene of your childhood is away—away in the country. You do not forget the hour when first you left those dear parents. You can see that father now as he grasped your hand in his, and with the other hand upon your shoulder, with faltering voice bade you "Farewell." You feel still the warm tears of that dear mother upon your cheek, as she gave you her parting kiss, and whispered her final words of entreaty. Then, when, with a choking sensation in your throat, you turned away, did you think it possible that you would ever say or do anything that would give pain to those fond parents? Did you not leave them with a determination to please them, and so reward them for their love? Was not *then* your highest ambition to gratify their hopes and expectations? And now you have been months or years in this metropolis, do the same feelings possess you? If not, do you not think it would be better for you if those fresh, those pure, those early, those beautiful feelings remained in their full force? Oh! my brothers, you may have grown wiser and more manly—you may have outgrown much of your childish simplicity and boyish wonder—but shame, *shame* upon you if you have grown out of your love, attention, and respect to your parents!

Some of you have lost one, or both, of those dear ones. They have gone to the land of unrevealed mysteries, and you no longer have their kind and anxious counsels. To you I say, let reverence for their memory lead you to pursue the course you know would gratify them were they still living. Act and speak as though they were watching and hearing all—as indeed they may be. When the great composer Mendelssohn lost his father, he wrote with deep feeling of his irreparable loss and then said, "I shall now work with double zeal at the completion of 'St. Paul,' for my father urged me to it in the very last letter he wrote to me; and he looked forward very impatiently to the completion of my work. I feel as if I must exert all my energies to finish it, and make it as good as possible, and then think that he takes an interest in it." That was a noble feature in the musical professor's character. More of that spirit you will do well to cultivate.

A father, when dying, summoned to his bedside three youths who had grown up together as brothers of one family, and said, "*One* of you is my son and to *him* I leave all my property." After the good man's death, a dispute arose as to which of the three was intended, and to settle the question it was brought before a magistrate. The body of the father was disinterred, and the magistrate ordered each of the three disputants to shoot an arrow at the dead man's heart. Two of them at once did so. But the third indignantly refused, saying, "I cannot shoot an arrow at my father's heart." This last was judged to have made a clear title to the property, and inherited all. Young man! whether your parents be living or dead, go you out into life with this firm determination, "*I will not—cannot—shoot an arrow at my parent's heart!*" In order that such a resolution may be formed and kept, come at once to the Father of spirits—the Father Who is in Heaven—and cry to Him, "My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth!" Think much of Jesus—that peerless pattern to young men—Who whilst a young man subjected Himself to the agonies of the garden and the Cross, because it was His Father's will. Trust in Him, love Him, imitate Him, and there will be no lack of filial obedience and affection in your life.

Easu

BY RIGHT REV. HARVEY GOODWIN, D.D.

"*Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing?*" etc.—Genesis xxvii. 38.

You will remember, that in the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle holds up the case of Esau as a warning to Christians. He says, "Look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; . . . lest there be any fornicator, or *profane person*, as *Esau*, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright: for ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

Taking the words of the text in connection with this Apostolical comment upon them, we may conclude that they contain a worthy subject for thought to Christians at all times. I wish then in this discourse to offer you some general remarks concerning Esau's character.

In the first place I will present you with the fair side of it. Unquestionably it has a fair side: Esau was by no means a man of unqualified wickedness or baseness; he had indeed some very noble qualities, and, judged according to the standard of the judgment of many men, would pass, I conceive, for a very worthy, estimable person. Let us take his conduct towards his brother Jacob as a specimen. You will remember, that after Jacob had defrauded him of their father's blessing he was extremely indignant, as he well might be, and in his wrath he threatened to slay his brother; but this was only a passing burst of rage: although his brother had done him a lasting injury, yet he did not cherish a lasting resentment. Quite otherwise: you will find in Gen. xxxiii., that when Jacob and Esau met each other again, and when Jacob feared exceedingly the effects of Esau's rage, Esau received him with all brotherly affection, never reproached him for his unkindness, but treated him with the utmost forbearance. Now, unquestionably this whole history puts Esau's character in a very favourable light: it represents him as an open-hearted generous person, who, though he might be rough in his manners, fond of a wild life, perhaps as rude and unpolished in mind as he was in body, had yet a noble soul, which was able to do what little minds sometimes cannot do, namely, forgive freely a cruel wrong done to him.

And even that selling of the birthright, upon which the Apostle founds the charge of profanity, would admit, in the minds of many persons, of considerable excuse. Esau one day came from the field weary and faint; he asked Jacob for some food; and Jacob, taking advantage of his hunger, begged of him to sell him his birthright for the food. Esau reasoned thus, "Behold, I am at the point to die, and what good shall this birthright do to me?" Accordingly he sold the birthright: and though no one can quite justify the act, yet it might be said that the conduct of Jacob was far more to be condemned, who took advantage of the hunger of his brother to get possession of that which he had no right to covet.

Nevertheless, it is not without reason that the Apostle styles Esau a profane person. I think that in order to gain the whole benefit of his history as an example to ourselves, it is not only permissible but quite necessary, that we should give full credit to all that we can find in his character which is good or amiable; for if he were a man of unqualified bad character, we might be disposed to put aside his example at once, as by no means presenting anything of importance to ourselves; it is just because his character has its fair side, nay, that he is such as many persons would hold up as a model of what men ought to be, that the contemplation of his failings, the dark side of his character, is full of interest and instruction.

What, then, was the defect in Esau's character? I think it may be described as a want of religious seriousness: there was (so to speak) nothing *spiritual* in him—no reverence for holy things—no indications of a soul, which could find no sufficient joys in this world, and which aspired to those joys which are at God's right hand for evermore.

That this is the true view will, I think, at once appear, if we consider what that birthright was which Esau sold for his mess of pottage. If it had been a mere earthly blessing, there would have been no evil in the transaction: but then also I think we may safely affirm, that Esau would not have sold it so easily; he would, I think, have borne

his hunger, or have endeavoured to find some other way of appeasing it, if he had been obliged to barter for the pottage all his worldly expectations. For you will notice, that, although we read that Esau despised his birthright, yet we do not read that he despised his father's blessing. When Isaac said that he had already blessed Jacob, and had made him lord and all his brethren servants, and sustained him with corn and wine, then Esau lifted up his voice and wept; he despised his birthright, but he wept for the loss of the corn and wine. What then was this birthright? it was chiefly this, the priesthood of the family. There seems to be no doubt, that in patriarchal times the eldest-born was looked upon in somewhat of a sacred character: it has even been thought by some that "the goodly raiment of Esau," of which we read that Rebekah took it and put it upon Jacob, was no common clothing, but consisted of sacred garments which belonged to Esau in his character of priest of the family. Moreover, the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed the earth should be blessed, together with all those other revelations which made the family of Abraham expect that something great and wonderful was to arise from their posterity, would give a great religious importance to the head of the family, in whom it would be conceived that all such hopes centred. But whatever this birthright was, (and it is unnecessary for me to enter upon the discussion at any length,) this is at all events certain, that it was a *spiritual* blessing, not a blessing of corn and wine, but something which could only be valued by a mind having some spiritual discernment. And this being so, what value was Esau likely to put upon his birthright? "What good shall this birthright do me?" said Esau, when he was faint and hungry: it was not meat and drink—what good could there be in it? Here you see the want of spirituality in Esau's character: everything, you will observe, must be tried by an earthly standard; that is good which satisfies the bodily appetite, which gratifies the carnal taste; a spiritual birthright is a delusion—a mess of pottage is much better than that: give me something that will satisfy my wants now, and do not tell me of spiritual privileges; let those have them who care about them and understand them—my tastes are different and less fanciful. This is the kind of language which men of Esau's turn of mind will use; and it seems to justify the title of *profane* which the Apostle has assigned to him. For by that name I understand the Apostle to describe the carnal, unspiritual man; the man, who, without being necessarily depraved, dishonest, unclean, blasphemous, or the like, does nevertheless take his stand upon this world as the end of his thoughts and the scene of all his activity; who considers the land as a great hunting field, as Esau considered it; who practically makes the satisfaction of his bodily wants and tastes the whole end of living; and who, thus ignoring the existence within him of a soul which can only live in God, leaves spiritual things to others, who may be foolish enough to care about them.

And this *profanity* of Esau, as it is called, is further illustrated by another circumstance. Esau, we read, married two wives of the Hittites; and we read that this was a "grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." And again, Rebekah feared exceedingly lest Jacob in like manner should marry any of the women of the country where they were dwelling; accordingly Jacob was sent to Haran, to Laban, Rebekah's brother, and he took a wife from her family. Now there can be no doubt, but that Esau's Canaanitish marriages were in the eyes of his parents a religious offence; he was going out of the family to whom the promises were made: and though we may not be able entirely to enter into the feelings of the patriarchs, yet unquestionably if Esau had been soberly and religiously minded he would not have acted as he did. He would often have heard, how that his grandfather Abraham had charged his servant with an oath not to allow Isaac his son to marry one of the Canaanitish women, but to go to his own kindred and take him a wife from thence. And a charge of this kind would come down to all right-minded persons with a very weighty sanction; we see, indeed, how much weight was attributed to it by Isaac and Rebekah: but Esau was not a man, with whom such views would have much influence; his fancy led him to marry a Canaanitish woman, and a Canaanitish woman he must marry; what harm was there in it? why was one race better than another? he might even deem it narrowminded and illiberal to attribute any virtue to one particular family. But the root of all was, that his taste led him in a certain direction, and he had no higher spiritual principle within him to check and control that taste. And the feeling of mind which would lead Esau to despise the religious scruples, and probably the parental commands, of Isaac and Rebekah, in the matter of his Canaanitish marriages, is quite in keeping with that, which led him to despise his birthright.

Thus then, without unduly depreciating Esau's character, we may very easily see in what sense and with what justice the Apostle calls him profane : and now one word about his repentance, of which the Apostle also speaks as being a warning to us, because it came too late and in vain.

Esau's repentance is still consistent with his character : what is there remarkable about Esau's repentance? this—that it was manifestly of the wrong kind. "Godly sorrow," says the Apostle, "worketh repentance not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death." Esau's sorrow was of this latter kind; it was emphatically sorrow of *this world*--grief for the loss of the corn and wine : he found that after all his labour spent upon the things of this life, Jacob was still to have the richer portion : Jacob had taken his birthright; that, however, he could pardon him; but it grieved Esau to his very soul, that Jacob had gotten the promise of this world's wealth beside. Now how *can* such sorrow be availing? Esau does not repent of his profanity, does not see the mistake of his life; he continues in heart unchanged, he is only touched by the loss of what he had been expecting in the way of worldly goods : there is nothing holy in this, nothing that is not quite consistent with the charge of being still what the Apostle calls "profane." And so Esau wept at last, and wept in vain; "Ye know how that when he would have inherited the blessing he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

And now, upon this review of Esau's character, what lesson may we draw for the improvement of our own? The leading feature of Esau's character, so far as his character was bad, was (as I have said) a want of religious seriousness; an essentially irreligious, unspiritual man; though not unjust, covetous, an extortioner, an adulterer, a liar, a thief, or a murderer, none of these, very far from them, still an ungodly man, one altogether of the earth earthy, one in whom the spiritual life was dead. And yet he was not a man living under spiritual disadvantages, not living in an atmosphere where everything savoured of the low and worldly, and where it would have required an almost supernatural effort to break the trammels by which his soul was bound, and to rise to better things : on the contrary, of all men on the face of the earth he appeared most highly favoured—the eldest son of the heir of the promises, the inheritor of the mystical birthright : and this being so, do you not see with what force those words of the Apostle apply to a body of Christians like ourselves, "Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest there be amongst you any profane person like Esau"? Do you not see that this is precisely the warning which professing Christians require, "*not to despise their birthright*"? Who more highly privileged than ourselves? what birthright more glorious and noble than that of us, who have been born again of water and of the Holy Ghost? our danger is, not lest the grace of God should not be given to us, but lest we should fail of the grace of God, or fall from grace given; our danger is not lest we should be born to spiritual beggary, but lest, being born to a royal inheritance, we should despise it and barter it for a mess of pottage. And if we do fail of the grace of God, or if without actually falling away we decline in our spiritual life, the reason will probably be, that the temper of Esau's mind has infected our own; it will be no great wonder if we be so infected, because the disease has been epidemic since the fall : the disease is that of worldly tastes and wishes getting possession of the mind, and driving out spiritual thoughts. We see by daily experience how common the disease is; we find how difficult it is to persuade men to measure everything by a high standard; not to make selfish advantage the test of every scheme, the touchstone of all excellence. And how few are there who lead a really spiritual life, of whom it can be said that "their life is hid with Christ in God!" how few who honestly make growth in holiness the only growth, in which they feel much concern! Alas, that so it should be—but so alas it is! I do not wish to paint the complexion of Christian society darker than it is; I would acknowledge with all thankfulness, that a wondrous change has come over the face of the world, since Christ was raised up in this wilderness that men might look to Him : but still that there is much of that character of mind which the Apostle calls profane, and which the character of Esau exhibited, I cannot pretend to doubt.

I would not that any of us should despise his birthright, and one day have cause to lament that he has missed the aim of his life when no place of repentance is left. But he who in the time of health and strength does not strive to lead a holy, godly, religious life, cannot wonder if the reality of those spiritual things which he now disregards should one day break upon him with very fearful terrors. And believe me, that it will be found to be in our case as it was in Esau's, that he who despises his birthright will

lose more than he thought; the birthright and the blessing go together; he who despises the one is not worthy of the other; he who sells one for a mess of pottage will find that the other will slip through his hands. Therefore, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, let us cultivate all holy habits and all Christian tastes; let us remember whereunto we are called, that we are a holy nation, a peculiar people, and that it is our happiness as well as our duty to offer up to God all the activity of our lives and all the love of our hearts.

Esau

BY RIGHT REV. J. R. WOODFORD, D.D.

*"Lest there be any fornicator or profane person, as Esau," etc.—
Hebrews xii. 16, 17.*

The history of Esau is one not without its difficulties, and yet it is perhaps true, that these difficulties are not so much suggested by the narrative in Genesis, as by the Apostle's observations thereupon. The difficulties may, we think, be reduced under two heads. The first arises from our indistinct notions of what that "birthright" was, which Esau sold: the second, from the terrible sentence of the Apostle, that the fallen patriarch found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully, with tears.

Now with regard to the exact nature of the birthright, so lightly parted with, so vainly coveted back again, we shall probably comprehend all that was involved in it by saying, that it embraced the priesthood of the family, and the claim to be the ancestor of the expected Messiah. The Church of God was then limited within the narrow bounds of Isaac's dwelling. That which has since expanded into the Church Catholic, was then confined within a single tent upon the broad Arabian plains. The name of the true God was there alone rightly named.* And so likewise of the Creed—all those mighty truths, of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, which as we proclaim our belief in them swell into the noblest anthem of Christendom, were then concentrated in the one pregnant article, of a Saviour to be born of the race of Abraham, in Whom the whole earth should find blessing. It was this one sublime anticipation which essentially divided off the tent of Isaac from every other dwelling: which formed the bond of unity to that lonely family, drawing the thoughts of their hearts on to one crowning Hope; binding all together in one mysterious confederacy, as the joint participators in the whole world, of the "secret of the Lord."

Now these considerations will, we think, go far to remove any difficulty growing out of the nature of the "birthright." It was, at any rate, essentially a spiritual privilege, and that of very noble character, which Esau resigned. That which he abandoned (and this is the point) was enough to bear the weight of the blame which ever afterwards attached to him. It was little else than apostasy, the abandonment of a religion and of the priesthood of that religion. Esau passed on his road: he married wives, he became the captain of men, the possessor of much wealth, the founder of a principality. The history of religion as contained in the Old Testament, leaves him and his, and groups around the children of the younger brother. But what of Esau himself? Did he cease to be a religious man? Might he not have carried with him, into other tents, the grand hope which lit with an unearthly light the tent of his father? How know we that he did not make those words of promise the anchor of his soul, amongst a strange people? Esau passed away—the Cave of Machpelah received him not—that single article of faith, developed into the glorious Gospel of the Blessed Lord; and then did one, moved by the Holy Ghost, write the true epitaph for the long-forgotten patriarch's unknown burial-place, "a profane person"; a "spiritual fornicator"; from whose example, the Church of the latter days was to take heed; ever watching, lest such another should arise within its borders.

I. LET US CONSIDER HIS PROFANENESS IN ITS COMMENCEMENT.

Now we shall best realize the character of Esau, by viewing it in juxta-position with that of Jacob. There is a strong contrast between them, even in their childhood. "And the boys grew," it is written; "and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents." From this original divergence of temper and habits, it is probable that every subsequent event is traceable. Esau is delineated as a man taking pleasure only in violent exercise, and exciting bodily pursuits. His

own momentary amusement was what he chiefly cared for, and his tastes led him to seek for this, not at home, but in the chase. He was a man of the field, a man we should gather, rarely found in Isaac's tent. And it is quite conceivable how, from this one circumstance, he came to set little store by his "birthright." The religion of the Patriarchs was essentially traditional; the great Promise, which we have spoken of as their creed, was handed down orally from father to son. But Esau's habits put him out of reach of hearing much about this mystery of godliness. Abroad in the field he was open to other influences—he came in contact with men who had no inheritance with the family of the Promise, whilst his frequent absence from his home, caused him to hear less and less of the Hope which was the charter of his race. Hence, its power to affect him was enfeebled, and when the trial came, it had little hold upon him. Jacob's disposition, on the contrary, was exactly such as to lead him earnestly to covet what, as the younger son, was naturally not for him. A plain man, dwelling in tents,—not a wanderer over the fields like his brother, but a dweller at home, Jacob would be ever hearing from Isaac's lips of the mysterious blessings attached to his family; he would be the perpetual listener of the old man's musings upon those oracles of Deity which had been uttered in his own and in Abraham's ears. Day after day, we can imagine, would Jacob drink in the strange story of his father's birth, announced by an Angel; of that awful scene upon Moriah, when he was restored again as from the dead, and the old promise re-affirmed by the celestial voice which had rescued him from immediate death. To Jacob this promise would be the key-note of his daily life: what Esau heard little about, he would be hourly having impressed upon him. Who marvels that, as years rolled on, "that plain man dwelling in tents," learnt to fasten his whole heart upon the solemn tradition of his house; to dream of it in the night—to meditate upon it in the day; till one absorbing desire grew upon him to divert the natural course of the blessing, and secure to himself and his own children the precious heirloom which had made Sarah the princess of the nations, and elevated Isaac's tent to the royalty of the universe.

And here we have the clue to the right understanding of the after history of the two brothers. We are not to think of Esau as what the world calls a bad man. It is clear that there was much of good and amiable in his disposition; nay, at first sight Esau's character is the more attractive. We revolt from the subtlety of Jacob, and sympathize with the elder brother in his losses and his woe. True we are told that after Jacob's great fraud, Esau sought to kill him; but even then, in the full outburst of his anger, he bethought him of what would be Isaac's grief, and delayed his vengeance until the days of mourning for his father should have come, and the old man be at rest from the possibility of sorrow. And that he ultimately abandoned all idea of avenging himself, and that his fraternal affection revived in full force is manifest from the account of the meeting of the brothers in after years. "Esau," it is written, "ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him." And again he proposed to unite his lot with his brother's, and when Jacob refused, Esau still pleaded to leave some of his wealth with him as a gift. In the whole incident, as related in Genesis xxxiii., Jacob's conduct is cool, calm, calculating,—Esau's ardent and affectionate. It is to Esau that our natural sympathies are attracted, and yet, O strange contrast between the mind of man and the mind of God! the imperishable words are on the record, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord, yet I loved Jacob."

And what is the interpretation of this? Is it not that Esau was only the light-hearted man of this world—Jacob the man of religious faith? Esau was profane, not as leading a profligate life, but as being a man without God. And on the other hand, Jacob, with all that repels us in his wiliness and lying in wait to profit by his brother's necessities, yet stands forth conspicuous for his religious convictions. It required, indeed, long years for his religion to perfect his character; a weary pilgrimage and sharp trials were needed to root out the evil that was in him. He who took advantage of a brother's hunger, must himself suffer by famine; he who deceived his own father in borrowed garments, must himself be deceived by his own sons, with the falsely-stained coat of many colours, before he was fitted for the presence of God. But from the beginning Jacob had just what Esau had not, a love for the word which the Lord had spoken; hence when Esau came home weary with his hunting, and begged of him the pottage, the thought that was ever uppermost in his mind showed itself in the very abruptness of the demand, "Sell me thy Birthright."

O it is a strange parable, that sale of the Birthright; but it is a parable fulfilled again

and again in the irreligious man selling eternity for time; the man of faith giving all that he now has for a better hope in years to come. It is a parable having its own peculiar lesson for our own days. Now, when natural accomplishments are so highly valued, when intellect, science, energy, skill, win the admiration even of foes; and implicit belief is construed as superstition, a self-denying, meditative life viewed almost as treason to the interests of human fellowship; when the busy world roars by on its way, a wild hunter, bent only upon its gains and sports; and the voices of eternity, like Isaac's feeble accents, have no power to charm,—Now, when even religion is denuded, as much as possible, of every thing supernatural; and whilst honour, and benevolence, and generosity are lauded, and a general providence recognised, prayer, meditation, sacramental grace, like the promise of old, are put aside; we call you back over the waste of centuries to Isaac's tent, and show you the types of our modern life in his twin sons, and bid you note how the man of religious faith, in spite of many faults, won the eternal love, so that his name was set like a pearl of price in the diadem of the Omnipotent, and God vouchsafed to be known and worshipped evermore as the God of Jacob; whilst the man of this world, the free, frank hunter of the desert, brave yet without reverence, affectionate yet without faith, became an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; stamped, for a perpetual warning, as the profane person who for one morsel of meat sold his Birthright.

II. WE PASS TO THE CONSIDERATION OF ESAU'S PROFANENESS, IN ITS FINAL ISSUE.

We are all familiar with the fact of Esau's anguish when he found that Jacob in his absence had obtained the blessing intended for himself. "When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceeding bitter cry." And again, "Esau lifted up his voice and wept." Now there is at first sight an inconsistency between this acute feeling and Esau's general recklessness. What, we ask, can this be he who so wantonly parted with his Birthright with all its sacred attributes? Is it the same voice which uttered the infidel speech, "What profit shall my Birthright do me," which now pours forth that bitter cry for a lost blessing? It is to be noted that about forty-five years had elapsed between the sale of the Birthright and the great scene of Jacob's subtlety. During this long period we have no hint of any effort on the part of Esau to regain that which he had sold, or of any sorrow for the irreligious act he had done. Notwithstanding, however, his acquiescence for so many years in the loss of the Birthright, he wept bitterly when his father's blessing seemed also gone. Now is there really any inconsistency of character in this? We believe not. It may be that all along Esau cherished a vague hope of recovering what he had abandoned. He was too worldly-minded to let his past act disquiet him; he realized too little spiritual things, to labour for its restitution; but when it did occur to his mind it is probable that he disliked to imagine it irrevocably forfeited, that he trusted that something might turn up to give him again the rights of the first-born, and that when Isaac told him to prepare the savoury meat, that his soul might bless him, the light-hearted but not wholly hardened man, recurred in thought to the lost Birthright, and conceived hopes that the prophetic blessing, to be given "before the Lord," might undo his own reckless deed, and so went forth with his favourite weapons to the field, with high hopes that now at length his hour was come, and that the words of the dying would nullify the rash bargain of his youth. Very awfully then must have dropped upon his ears the fatal sentence, "Thy brother came with subtlety and hath taken away thy blessing." Then, it may be, for the first time broke fully on his soul the irremediable nature of what he had done; then God's hand became intensely visible to him, shutting him out from the rights he had scorned. The unlooked-for manner in which Jacob had secured the blessing, thwarting Isaac's settled purpose in his own favour, a manner which no prudence of his could have guarded against, forced on him, we may believe, the recognition of a higher Power behind the veil, barring his return, binding in Heaven the bargain which he had bound on earth. Then first, perhaps, he felt that it was God Whom he had renounced; that the Birthright was the shape in which the eternal world had presented itself to him, and so with his sorrow for a lost privilege on earth may have mingled terrible forebodings that in signing away the Birthright he had signed away his claim to rest hereafter in the bosom of Abraham. And thus we may indeed hear the cry of a lost soul, when first aware that its doom is fixed for ever, in that bitter lament which has echoed until now down the valley of time, a warning to the profane, making even the hearts of the righteous sad.

And in all this again is Esau a correct type of a common character. How do men live on year after year foregoing religious privileges, forgetting God, and scarcely

remember it! The man who has been baptised, and whose conscience tells him that he dare not die as he is; what is he but one who has verily parted with his spiritual Birthright? Once he was sure of Heaven, now he is sure no longer; nay, if he reflects has little hope of Heaven in his present state; where is his Birthright? He means to alter before he dies. He intends to win back his inheritance. He will reform by-and-by, become more devout, more godly, in future years; meanwhile he pursues his common course, neither better nor worse than others; with a vague notion when he reflects, that his soul is unsafe, yet not sufficiently alive to the fact, to apply himself vigorously to work out his salvation, but trusting that the time and the opportunity will come, he knows not when, to set himself right with God. O sirs, what is this but Esau risen from the dead,—Esau, dimly conscious of a loss, yet continuing in the same career which ruined him at the outset, a cunning hunter, and nothing but a cunning hunter still? We must wait till the next world for the “exceeding bitter cry” from such men, for it is seldom here that the conviction of being lost for ever is experienced. The measure of their religion in life is the measure of it in death. It is Esau to the last, willing, if he can, to gain the blessing by a day’s hunting, but neither overwhelmed with fear, nor broken-hearted for his fault, nor seeing in their true colours, his own sins. Weigh the religious acts of an ordinary death-bed by the worldliness of the past life, or by the glory of the reward expected, and how utterly inadequate do they seem. It is as if the habit of treating religion lightly, once contracted, dislocated the whole moral being, so that we can never afterwards see, or hear, or taste aright, the powers of the world to come. And therefore the thoughtful man, who feels what sin is, what God is, what Heaven is, must often fear for those who fear not for themselves; and tremble, lest the instant of the death pang should be the signal of a terrible awakening—lest, at the moment when this world hears the faint whisper of the dying no longer, the eternal world may be ringing with the loud, bitter cry of a soul just conscious of a birthright lost for ever.

It is a lesson against apathy to those things which are essentially religious that Esau teaches. He warns us that a life without God, a life however useful and amiable upon which the shadow of God does not rest, leads often to perdition. To turn our backs upon what is purely spiritual, to have no interest in the progress of Christ’s Church, to abstain from, or join without heart in Divine worship or the Lord’s Supper, to be content to be honourable without being holy, gentle without being devout, to be anything short of a Man of Faith, is to be profane, and profaneness was the path upon which Esau walked to his despair. And more than this, he warns us likewise, that man of the field, that cunning hunter, how over-indulgence of any natural taste, over-occupation with any business or amusement, loosens our hold upon the verities of the eternal world; eats out our faith in things unseen, so that when the hour of trial comes we fall an easy prey to the tempter. If we would keep a firm grasp upon God’s truth, if we desire that death and judgment, the Father’s long suffering, Christ’s tender love, should be a power upon our souls, holding us up when we slip, keeping us from ever in a moment of hasty passion, or thoughtless levity, bartering our Birthright away by deadly sin, then must we be very careful not to let earthly toils, however needful in a measure, or earthly amusements, however innocent, obtain a mastery over us; never to permit them to trench upon our devotions, and dull our perceptions of the spiritual world, which is even now around us, or to make us forgetful of the eternity of being, which awaits us when the iron door shall at length fold to and shut us in with the spirits before the Flood. Whatever leaves us no time for all this, alienates imperceptibly but surely from the love of God, and prepares us in the day of temptation to let our Birthright slip from our hands.

Jacob

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

“*Jacob was a plain man,*” etc.—*Genesis xxv. 27.*

Jacob’s character was in almost every respect the opposite of Esau’s; and in youth at least far less naturally attractive. He was a “plain man, dwelling in tents.” Whichever of its disputed meanings we attach to the epithet “plain,” it does not greatly alter the aspect of Jacob’s character; perhaps the highest is the nearest to the truth; he was a cultivated as his brother was a rough man; a man of the tent, as the other was a man

of the forest, the hill-side, and the waste. His taste was for the flocks and herds, for domestic cares and pursuits. As the natural result of the common instincts of our nature, he was the mother's, as Esau was the father's favourite. The somewhat inactive character of Isaac delighted in the daring of his hunter son, whilst the mother found in her more civilised child a companionship and sympathy which she could never taste in the company of the wild man of the desert, the husband of Hittite wives whom she abhorred. Though, moreover, in Jacob's early life there is no more mark of godliness than there is about that of Esau, yet there must in the younger son have been always present that substratum of affectionateness of heart which is the special character of his after years, and which is always so dear to a mother's soul. Jacob's natural character combined remarkably the distinctive features of both his parents. It repeated much of his father's musing, meditative temperament, whilst the stronger passions of his mother's nature stirred its depths to bursts of feeling unknown to Isaac, and whilst there was joined with it the shrewd business powers which seem to have pervaded the family of Laban. His unenterprising home life was in him probably in part the consequence and in part the cause of a certain timidity of nature; which must have shrunk from very close contact with his rough and daring brother. The visits of Esau to the tent beside the waters of Lahai-roi could have been no time of enjoyment for Jacob. Doubtless they drew closer together the bonds between himself and Rebekah, whilst he felt himself eclipsed in the view of the old patriarch, who ate gladly of his favourite son's venison, and listened with wondering admiration to the stories of the adventures and the risks through which Esau's quiver and his bow had secured the welcome game.

Thus the mother's influence would be great with Jacob, and it would almost surely tend to evil. Such a man must be sorely tempted to gain by intrigue what natural force secured for his brother—and the spirit of intrigue is an inherent attribute of the Arab woman. As the desert nourished the fierce independence of Esau's nature, so would Rebekah nurse the lurking subtlety of Jacob's heart. There would be, moreover, a certain aspect of piety about her scheming conduct. Deep in the mother's heart lay the old prophetic utterance, "The elder shall serve the younger"; it was the Will of God that this beloved son, who cowered before his braggart brother, should live to be his lord. She had not learned that deep lesson of faith, the leaving God to work out His Will in His own way. She must help forward its accomplishment. She would possess the mind of Jacob with the same idea. In their after converse, in times of peace and hope, still more, perhaps, when Esau's unwelcome presence drove them into closer and yet more intimate relations, she would fill his heart with visions which belonged to that yet to be accomplished prophecy which Isaac perhaps had never heard, perhaps had long since forgotten. The securing the fulfilment of this prediction by any means would by little and little become with Jacob, as with his mother, the ruling idea with which his mind was full. Its first recorded outbreak was when at thirty-two years of age he tempted his hungry brother to sell his birthright for the savoury mess of lentile pottage. Here the opposite characters of the two men stand out in the boldest relief. The impulsive Bedouin hunter, returning half-famished from some unsuccessful chase, saying under the constraining influence of appetite, "What profit shall this birthright do me?" and so for a momentary enjoyment sacrificing the religious and the temporal rights which by patriarchal use belonged to the first-born; acting herein as a "profane person," as a thorough man of this world, yielding up the future, even the spiritual future, for the immediate and the carnal. Jacob, on the other hand, thoughtful, and given to anticipations of the future; eager to please the mother whom he loved, seeing an opportunity of securing what she had taught him that God meant him to possess, and so with a meanness bred of a subtle intellect, of misleading affections, of a timid temper, and of a debased religiousness, tempted his brother to a sin by which he was himself to profit. Here is the cunning hunter, the man of the field outwitted, as he always is, by the polished man dwelling in the tent.

The next great scene of the two lives, five-and-thirty years later, is when by another act of subtlety he steals away the blessing as he had meanly purchased the birthright of the first-born. Here all the lines are darker. Rebekah is yet more visibly the tempter. Her son, more timid, perhaps less deceitful than herself, shrinks from the perfidy of abusing the darkened sight of his aged father. But she overbears his resistance. She has now persuaded herself that it is well to lie for God, that the great just God of Truth can be helped in the government of His world by a cunning, devil-born falsehood; and she succeeds in her plot, and the younger son secures the blessing.

Here again Esau's character breaks out into most indicative revelations. The wild despair, the passionate pleading, the cry for another blessing—with no apparent sense of the greatness of his higher loss, but with a keen perception of the present evil, and so the cry for a temporal if he could not have the spiritual blessing—here are the evident utterances of a character all impulse; venting its sadness in the unspoken thought that when the old man, whose heart it would grieve, was at rest, he would slay his traitor brother, and so wipe away at once the injury and the insult.

It needed no speaking out of the revengeful purpose to alarm Rebekah. The dark, silent, strong-willed woman used to watch with that keen eastern observance of hers every turn of countenance and tone and manner in her strange wild son of the desert, read it at a glance. She had gained her point; Jacob had won both the birthright and the blessing, but she had imperilled his life, and she must save it.

There is a deep strain of artifice in her next device. She wakes up in the old father's heart its aching remembrance of Esau's unholy marriages, in order to exalt her younger born. Rebekah said unto Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

Again she succeeds. Isaac sends away his son from the threatening danger which he knew not of, to find a wife from the daughters of his mother's house. She succeeds, but at what a cost! She loses the son of her love; has to bear henceforward a solitary life; has to live alone; to die alone. For those eyes, it seems clear, see the beloved one again no more for ever. The busy, scheming head was laid low in the dust, it may be weighed prematurely down by the sorrowful harvest she had sown in deceitfulness to reap in anguish.

A new reach of Jacob's life opens with his separation from his mother. The hand of God had taken him into the wilderness there to plead with him mightily. It was a long and a bitter pleading. His own old sin returns before him time after time, as if its haunting presence never would leave him. He had sinned by treachery against his near of kin, and the treachery of those near of kin to him embittered all his life. First, there is Laban's great and often-repeated perfidy. As he had consented to his mother's voice, and lied to his blind father to win the elder brother's portion, so his mother's brother lies to him to win for the elder daughter the marriage he offers to the younger. Into this one master fraud were gathered up for him the seeds of all the long sorrows which darkened his after life. From this came the other great deceit which whitened before the time the hairs of his head; when his own elder sons, hating their younger brother, the child of his beloved Rachel, because his own heart was bound up with the life of the lad, sell Joseph into Egypt; and as he had deceived Isaac with the flesh and the skins of the kid, so they deceived him by dipping in the kid's blood the coat of many colours. Surely God was purging out of the soul of His servant this close-clinging evil even by the hotness of the furnace fire. For coincidentally with these retributive sorrows God was giving to him another and a yet deeper teaching. The griefs and injuries of life, if sent alone, might only have hardened and embittered him. But this inner teaching gave to them their special character and power of moral healing.

That inner teaching began at once on Jacob's separation from his mother. Half his life was then spent—spent amidst the enervating and lowering influences of inaction, and want of responsibility, of timidity, flavoured by a certain natural subtlety which was encouraged by the mother, whose influence over him was supreme. With all these elements of weakness abounding in him, he is cast suddenly forth into the wilderness, the perils of which his martial brother loved, but which he had always dreaded. The home-loving, timid, thoughtful man is forced to rely upon and act altogether for himself. On one misty, ill-apprehended belief alone can he at all rest his anxious spirit. There is a future before him. In himself the great promises for which Abraham had wandered and Isaac had waited, now surely centred. He had the birthright and the blessing. To that mysterious future his mother's voice, with all her faults, had ever taught him to look forward. Here was the point of difference between himself and Esau. Esau lived for the present, he lived for the future. That dim, uncertain outline ever before his eye gave to life in him a meaning and a depth which it could never have in the clear, bright, dancing, sunlit, but shallow, waters of his brother's objectless being. That worldly spirit lacked utterly the receptive faculty to which higher communications could address themselves. Jacob's soul was ready for them. And they were given to him. As he journeys towards Haran, he lights at eventide upon a certain

place. The red sun, like a wearied giant proudly flinging himself to rest, goes down with sudden speed below the wide horizon. The benighted wanderer makes the hasty preparation which alone is possible, and prepares his hard pillow of the desert stones. The bright stars fade away before his weary eyes, and he sleeps. Then the vision wakes. He sees the mystic ladder joining together earth and Heaven; he marks with wonder the ascending and descending Angels, and he hears the voice of the personal God; with him there in the waste as much as in the tent of Isaac; gathering into shape and form that misty future on which his mind had ever dwelt; and above all, promising to him a perpetual presence and a constant guard. "I am with thee, and will keep thee. I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. xxviii. 15). He awoke with a sense of God's nearness to him, which made the very place "dreadful." The vision of the night-watches had changed everything around him. There was no loneliness now in that unpeopled waste: it was full of God. The great training of his spirit had begun. That close, perpetual presence of the personal God made life another thing. It was not for him to weave cunning schemes with sharp, dishonourable subtlety in order to bring to pass the purposes of the great God, Who had said to his inmost spirit, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." The answer of Jacob's heart is immediate, though it betrays much remaining darkness. There is the "If God will be with me and bring me again, then the Lord shall be my God." The light of God's verity is breaking through, and manifestly scattering the darkness.

With this new light, he goes on his journey, and reaches "the people of the east." Then follows his long service with Laban, and his own practical experience of what deceit is. By it all he is driven to rest himself on that mysterious presence which is now shed around his being; and as he communes with that, he sees the stains upon his own life, the weakness of his own heart. And so the work within advances. For one-and-twenty weary years he labours and toils at Padan-aram: the drought consumes by day, and the frost by night, until the hand which others saw not seemed through his reading of Laban's altered countenance to beckon him to depart. He sets out on his return. Some remains of his old self-trusting subtlety, not yet purged out of his heart, lead to his secret flight, and bring on him at once the threatening pursuit of Laban. From this great danger God's direct interference alone delivers him. The recollections of the long past, God's visitation, God's promises, the revelation of his own feebleness and sin—these crowd around him as he retraces his way. He needs them all, for his life is full of peril. He must pass beside the border of the hill country, in which Esau, his injured brother, had grown into a warlike tribe. Now would come, his heart whispered to him, the long-delayed day of reckoning. The more he had learned to see the true character of his own faithless falsehood, the more terrible that danger must have looked. He prepares for it as best he may; but his heart, made tender by discipline, bled for the wife of his love and the children God had given him. But his God had not forgotten His servant. He saw and pitied the weaknesses of His child. At Mahanaim he is met by the angelic host, whose footsteps he had seen upon the heavenly ladder, one-and-twenty years before. But he needs more strength yet, and a greater vision is before him. At the ford Jabbok he sends on before him his wives, his eleven children, and all that he has, and remains himself alone behind—doubtless for unwitnessed, undisturbed communion with his God. It was not in vain that he was led to wait for it. "Jacob," is the mysterious record, "was left alone, and there wrestled a Man with him till the breaking of the day," when the unknown Stranger said, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh." But the mighty One Who wrestled with him strengthened him for the unearthly struggle, and the opened and ennobled heart of the long-tried patriarch put forth its last strength in that passionate cry for aid, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." The loving discipline of the Almighty had done its work. Close and yet closer his God had drawn to him; and by that near presence, the work of purifying his inmost spirit had been mercifully accomplished. A new name, given him by God, sealed his new character; the meanness of the supplanter was gone; the royal spirit was come. Jacob, "the supplanter," was turned into Israel, "a prince with God." Though the sorrows which chastised his early sin were not yet exhausted; though he had yet to bear the shame of Dinah's fall, the grief of his heart at Simeon's and Levi's cruel and treacherous vengeance; yet from this time a new atmosphere is round about him: he is delivered from Esau; he reaches safely his father's house; he joins with Esau in the solemn burial of Isaac. The two

brothers part to meet no more, but they part in peace. They share between them their father's goods; the old jealousy and wrath have died out, even of memory: the planter of a new tribe, the head of the future race of the Edomites, takes his "wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the souls of his house; and his cattle, and his beasts, and all his substance which he had got in the land of Canaan, and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob; for their riches were more than that they might dwell together. . . . Thus dwelt Esau in Mount Seir; Esau is Edom."

But the great patriarch's course was not yet accomplished. Few and evil, as he afterwards, on retrospect, esteemed the days of the years of his pilgrimage, he had yet twenty-five of them to spend. Chequered they still were with many sorrows. The punishment of "the supplanter's" subtlety lasted on after its guilt had been forgiven to the Prince with God. He had yet to weep over the jealous hatred which the offspring of Leah and the handmaidens bore to Rachel's beloved son; he had yet, when the cruel deceitfulness of the ten brethren, that fruit of Laban's treachery, had sent him the coat of many colours, stained, as he believed, with Joseph's blood, to mourn sadly forth his sorrow when "he refused to be comforted, and said, For I will go down into the grave to my son mourning"; he had yet to part with Benjamin, and say, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

The especial character of these last years of the patriarch's life is one of deep and lively affectionateness. This is traceable at every turn, and gives its colour to the whole scene. There is an intense humanity about his character which wakes up in every heart a filial feeling of reverential love towards the aged man. We see this in the conduct of the great Pharaoh towards his vizier's father. How grand in its simplicity is the inspired record of this remarkable meeting between the old desert chief and the haughty Pharaoh! The king's question seems to point to the stamp of extreme age as set already on those venerable features—"How many are the days of the years of thy life?" "Few and evil" the old man pronounces them to have been; and then, with the eastern solemnity of age, gives to the Egyptian king the blessing of Jehovah.

As Jacob draws nearer to his end, the halo round his withered brow glows with yet brighter colours. The sorrows of the past are a departing vision; the bitter breaking up of his life from the tent of Isaac, and the companionship of his mother; the cruel treachery of Laban; the loss of Rachel, the well-beloved wife; the quarrels and the scandals of his family—all, one by one, melt away in the distance. The one remaining and ever-increasing idea of that life is the presence of God with it; the vision before his going down into Egypt gradually expands over and covers the canvas; other voices die away; this only he hears—"I am God, the God of thy father; fear not. I will go down with thee into Egypt" (Gen. xlv. 3, 4). Seventeen years he spent there in that blessed companionship; seeing Joseph's greatness and the wonderful multiplication of his seed; and then "the time drew nigh that Israel must die." And round his dying bed the powers of the world to come arrayed themselves, and there fell on him the breath of clear, exalted prophecy. From the shadows of his own coming end, his eye ranged on along the ages until, in prophetic foresight, he saw the Conqueror of death. A stranger himself, tarrying for a season in the land of ancient sovereignties, he speaks of his own, as yet subject, race as royal, and of its rule as universal: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." What more, after such an utterance, could he do than "gather up his feet into the bed, and yield up the ghost, and be gathered unto his people"?

Jacob

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," etc.—Genesis xlvii. 9.

So the experience of Israel himself is summed up in the close of his life. Human cares, jealousies, sorrows, cast their shade over the scene,—the golden dawn of the Patriarchal age is overcast; there is no longer the same unwavering faith; we are no longer in communion with the "High Father," the "Friend of God"; we at times

almost doubt whether we are not with His enemy. But for this very reason the interest attaching to Jacob, though of a less lofty and universal kind, is more touching, more penetrating, more attractive.

Look at him, as his course is unrolled through the long vicissitudes which make his life a faithful mirror of human existence in its many aspects. Look at him, as compared with his brother Esau. Esau, the shaggy, red-haired huntsman, the man of the field, with his arrows, his quiver, and his bow, coming in weary from the chase, caught as with the elvly and eagerness of a child, by the sight of the lentile soup—"Feed me, I pray thee, with the red, red pottage,"—yet so full of generous impulse, so affectionate towards his aged father, so forgiving towards his brother, so open-hearted, so chivalrous, who has not at times felt his heart warm toward the poor rejected Esau; and been tempted to join with him as he cries with "a great and exceeding bitter cry," "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!" And who does not in like manner feel at times his indignation swell against the younger brother? "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he hath supplanted me these two times?"

But yet, taking the two from first to last, how entirely is the judgment of Scripture and the judgment of posterity confirmed by the result of the whole! The mere impulsive hunter vanishes away, light as air: "he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright." The substance, the strength of the Chosen family, the true inheritance of the promise of Abraham, was interwoven with the very essence of the character of the "plain man dwelling in tents," steady, persevering, moving onward with deliberate settled purpose, through years of suffering and prosperity, of exile and return, of bereavement and recovery. The birthright is always before him. Rachel is won from Laban by hard service, "and the seven years seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her." Isaac, and Rebekah, and Rebekah's nurse, are remembered with a faithful, filial remembrance; Joseph and Benjamin are long and passionately loved with a more than parental affection—bringing down his grey hairs for their sakes "in sorrow to the grave." This is no character to be contemned or scoffed at: if it was encompassed with much infirmity, yet its very complexity demands our reverent attention; in it are bound up, as his double name expresses, not one man, but two; by toil and struggle, Jacob the Supplanter, is gradually transformed into Israel, the prince of God; the harsher and baser features are softened and purified away: he looks back over his long career with the fulness of experience and humility. "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant." Alone of the Patriarchal family, his end is recorded as invested with the solemnity of warning and of prophetic song. "Gather yourselves together, ye sons of Jacob, and hearken unto Israel your father." We need not fear to acknowledge that the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac was also the God of Jacob.

Most unworthy indeed should we be of the gift of the Sacred narrative, if we failed to appreciate it in this, its full, its many-sided aspect. Even in the course of the Jewish history, what a foreshadowing of the future! We may venture to trace in the wayward chieftain of Edom the likeness of the fickle uncertain Edomite, now allied, now hostile to the seed of promise; the wavering, unstable dynasty, which came forth from Idumæa; Herod the magnificent and the cruel; Herod Antipas, who "heard John gladly" and slew him; Herod Agrippa, "almost a Christian"—half Jew and half heathen. "A turbulent and unruly race," so Josephus describes the Idumæans of his day: "always hovering on the verge of revolution, always rejoicing in changes, roused to arms by the slightest motion of flattery, rushing to battle as if they were going to a feast." But we cannot mistake the type of the Israelites in him whom, beyond even Abraham and Isaac, they recognised as their father Israel. His doubtful qualities exactly recall to us the meanness of character, which, even to a proverb, we call in scorn, "*Jewish*." By his peculiar discipline of exile and suffering, a true counterpart is produced of the special faults and special gifts, known to us chiefly through his persecuted descendants in the middle ages. In Jacob we see the same timid, cautious watchfulness that we know so well, though under darker colours, through our great masters of fiction, in Shylock of Venice and Isaac of York. But no less, in the nobler side of his career do we trace the germs of the unbroken endurance, the undying resolution, which keeps the nation alive still even in its present outcast condition, and which was the basis, in its brightest days, of the heroic zeal, long-suffering, and hope of Moses, of David, of Jeremiah, of the Maccabees, of the twelve Jewish Apostles, and the first martyr, Stephen.

We cannot, however, narrow the lessons of Jacob's history, to the limits of the Israelite

Church. All ecclesiastical history is the gainer by the sight of such a character so delineated. It is a character not all black nor all white, but chequered with the mixed colours which make up so vast a proportion of the double phases of the leaders of the Church and the world in every age.

Jacob's going out from Beersheba towards Haran, is, if one may so say, the first retrograde movement in the history of the Church. Was the migration of Abraham to be reversed? Was the westward tide of events to roll back upon itself? Was the Chosen Race to sink back into the life of Mesopotamian deserts? But the first halt of the wanderer revealed his future destinies. "The sun went down"; the night gathered round; he was on the central thoroughfare, on the hard backbone of the mountains of Palestine; the ground was strewn with wide sheets of bare rock; here and there stood up isolated fragments like ancient Druidical monuments. On the hard ground he lay down for rest, and in the visions of the night the rough stones formed themselves into a vast staircase, reaching into the depth of the wide and open sky, which, without any interruption of tent or tree, was stretched over the sleeper's head. On that staircase were ascending and descending the messengers of God; and from above there came the Divine Voice which told the houseless wanderer that, little as he thought it, he had a Protector there and everywhere; that even in this bare and open thoroughfare, in no consecrated grove or cave, "The Lord was in this place, though he knew it not." "This was Bethel, the House of God, and this was the gate of Heaven."

The chief interest of the story of Jacob's twenty years' service with Laban, lies in its re-opening of the relations between the settlers in Palestine and the original tribe of Mesopotamia, which appeared on Abraham's migration to have been closed. "Then Jacob 'lifted up his feet' and came into the land of the 'children' of the east. And he looked and behold a well in the field; and lo! three flocks of sheep lying by it, and a great stone was on the well's mouth." The shepherds were there; they had advanced far away from "the city of Nabor." It was not the well outside the walls, with the hewn staircase down which Rebekah descended with the pitcher on her head. Rachel comes, guiding her father's flocks, like the daughter of the Bedouin chiefs at the present day; and Jacob claims the Bedouin right of cousinship: "And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the *sheep* of Laban his mother's brother, [observe the simplicity of the juxtaposition], that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother; and Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept." Then begins the long contest of cunning and perseverance, in which true love wins the game at last against selfish gain. Seven years, the service of a slave, thrice over, did Jacob pay. He is the faithful eastern "good shepherd"; that which was torn of beasts he brought not unto his master; he bare the loss of it; of his hand "did his hard taskmaster" require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night; in the day the drought "of the desert" consumed him, and the frost in the cold eastern nights, "and his sleep departed from him." At last his fortunes were built up; the slave became a prince; and the second migration took place from Mesopotamia into Palestine, "with much cattle, 'with male and female slaves,' with camels and with asses."

It was the termination of the dark and uncertain prelude of Jacob's life. He is now the exile returning home after years of wandering. He is the chief, raised by his own efforts and God's providence to a high place amongst the tribes of the earth. He stands like Abraham on the heights of Bethel; like Moses in the heights of Pisgah; overlooking from the watch-tower, "the Mizpeh" of Gilead, the whole extent of the land, which is to be called after his name. The deep valley of the Jordan, stretched below, recalls the mighty change of fortune. "With my staff I passed over the Jordan, and now I am become two bands." The wide descent of the valley southward towards the distant mountains of Seir, reminds him of the contest which may be in store for him from the advancing tribe of his brother of Edom. But the story sets before us a deeper than any mere external change of struggle. It is as though the twenty years of exile and servitude had wrought their work. Every incident and word is fraught with a double meaning; in every instance earthly and spiritual images are put one over against the other, hardly to be seen in our English version, but in the original clearly intended. Other forms than his own company are surrounding him; another Face than that of his brother Esau is to welcome his return, to the land of his birth and kindred. He was become two "bands" or "hosts"; he had sent "messengers" before to announce his approach. But as Jacob went on his way, the "messengers" of God met him; as when he had

seen them ascending and descending the stair of Heaven at Bethel; and "when Jacob saw them he said, This is God's host, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim"; that is "The Two Hosts." The name was handed on to after ages, and the place became the sanctuary of the Transjordanic tribes, he was still on the heights of the Transjordanic hills beyond the deep defile where the Jabbok, as its name implies, "wrestles" with the mountains through which it descends to the Jordan. In the dead of night he sent his wives and sons, and all that he had across the defile, and he was left alone; and in the darkness and stillness, in the crisis of his life, in the agony of his fear for the issue of the morrow, there "wrestled" with him one whose name he knew not until the dawn rose over the hills of Gilead. They "wrestled," and he prevailed; yet not without bearing away marks of the conflict. He is saved, as elsewhere, in his whole career, so here; "saved, yet so as by fire!" In that struggle, in that seal and crown of his life, he wins his new name. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob "the supplanter,"—but Israel "the prince of God,"—for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed." The dark crafty character of the youth, though never wholly lost—for "Jacob" he still was called to the end of his days—has been by trial and affliction changed into the princelike, godlike character of his manhood. And what was He with Whom he had wrestled in the visions of the night, and Who had vanished from his grasp as the day was breaking? "Tell me, I pray Thee, *Thy* name." And He said, "wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?" And He blessed him there, and Jacob called the name of the place Peniel (that is "the face of God");—for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel, the sun, of which the dawn had been already breaking, "burst" upon him; and he "halted upon his thigh."

The dreaded meeting with Esau has passed; the two brothers retain their characters throughout the interview: the generosity of the one, and the caution of the other. And for the last time Esau retires to make room for Jacob; he leaves to him the land of his inheritance, and disappears on his way to the wild mountains of Seir.

So we part from the House of Esau, and return to the latter days of Jacob. He too moves onward. From the summit of Mount Gerizim the eye rests on the wide opening in the Eastern hills beyond the Jordan, which marks the issue of the Jabbok into the Jordan Valley. Through that opening, straight toward Gerizim and Shechem, Jacob descends "in peace and triumph."

At every stage of his progress henceforward we are reminded that it is the second, and not the first settlement of Palestine, that is now unfolding itself. It is no longer as in the case of Abraham, the purely pastoral life; it is the gradual transition from the pastoral to the agricultural. Jacob, on his first descent from the downs of Gilead, is no longer a mere dweller in tents; he "builds him an *house*"; he makes "*booths*" or "*huts*" for his cattle, and therefore the name of the place is called "Succoth." He advances across the Jordan; he comes to Shechem in the heart of Palestine, whither Abraham had come before him. But it is no longer the uninhabited "place" and grove; it is "the city" of Shechem, and "before the city" his tent is pitched. And he comes not merely as an Arabian wanderer, but as with fixed aim and fixed habitation in view. He sets his eye on the rich plain which stretches eastward of the city, now, as eighteen hundred years ago, and then as twenty centuries before, "white already to the harvest," with its waving cornfields. This, and not a mere sepulchre like the cave of Machpelah, is the possession which he purchases from the inhabitants of the land. The very pieces of money with which he buys the land are not merely weighed, as in the bargain with Ephron; they are stamped with the earliest mark of coinage, the figure of the lambs of the flocks. In this vale of Shechem the Patriarchs rest, as in a permanent home. Beersheba, Hebron, even Bethel, are nothing to him in comparison with this one chosen portion, which is to descend to his favourite son.

It is with the latest portion of Jacob's life that are most clearly interwoven those cords of natural and domestic affection which so bind his name round our hearts. He revisits then his old haunts at Bethel and Beersheba. The ancient servant of his house, Deborah, his mother's nurse, the only link which survived between him and the face which he should see no more, dies, and is not forgotten, but is buried beneath the hill of Bethel, under the oak well known to the many who passed that way in later times as Allonbachuth, "The Oak of Tears." They draw near to a place then known only by its ancient Canaanite name, and now for the first time mentioned in history, "Ephrath, which is Bethlehem." The village appears spread along its narrow ridge, but they are

not to reach it. "There was but a little way to come to Ephrath, and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. . . . And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, for she died, that she called the name of the child Ben-oni (that is, "the son of sorrow"); but his father called him Ben-jamin (that is, "the son of my right hand"). And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath. And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day." The pillar has long disappeared, but her memory long remained. She still lived on, in Joseph's dreams. Her name still clung to the nuptial benediction of the villagers of Bethlehem. After the allotment of the country to the several tribes, the territory of the Benjamites was extended by a long strip far into the south, to include the sepulchre of their beloved ancestress. When the infants of Bethlehem were slaughtered by Herod, it seemed to the Evangelist as though the voice of Rachel were heard weeping for her children from her neighbouring grave.

In the mixture of agricultural and pastoral life which now gathers round him, is laid the train of the last and most touching incidents of Jacob's story. It is whilst they are feeding their father's flocks together, that the fatal envy arises against the favourite son. It is whilst they are binding the sheaves in the well-known cornfield that Joseph's sheaf stands upright in his dream. On the confines of the same field at Shechem, the brothers were feeding their flocks, when Joseph was sent from Hebron to "see whether it were well with his brethren and well with the flocks, and to bring his father word again." And from Shechem he followed them to the two wells of Dothan, in the passes of Manasseh, when the caravan of Arabian merchants passed by, and he disappeared from his father's eyes. His history belongs henceforth to a wider sphere. The glimpse of Egypt, opened to us for a moment in the life of Abraham, now spread into a vast and permanent prospect.

The story of the descent into Egypt, too simple to need any elaborate elucidation, is a fitting close to the life of Jacob. Once more he is to set forth on his pilgrimage. He came to the frontier plain of Beersheba; he received the assurance that beyond that frontier he was to descend yet further into Egypt. He "went down" from the steppes to Beersheba; he crossed the desert and met his son on the border of the cultivated land; he was brought into the presence of the great Pharaoh; he saw his race established in the land of Egypt. And then the time drew near that Israel must die, and his one thought, oftentimes repeated, was that his bones should not rest in that strange land, not in pyramid or painted chamber, but in the cell that he had "dugged for himself" in the primitive sepulchre of his fathers. So his body was embalmed after the manner of the Egyptians; and a vast funeral procession bore it away; the asses and the camels of the pastoral tribe mingling with the chariots and horsemen characteristic of Egypt.

Pharaoh

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh."—Exodus ix. 12.

There is no doubt some great reason why the history of Pharaoh should be so much held up to our remembrance: and the most marked point connected with him is that Scripture, in reference to him, with such remarkable frequency and repetition, uses the expression that God hardened his heart. This then requires our particular attention. It is indeed said in this account that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, or that his heart was hardened; but the point which strikes us, and is no doubt intended to do so, is that of the text.

It may be that the conduct of Pharaoh is so lifted up to our eyes, as casting its shadows over the future, as containing in it the resemblance of other events, as a prophecy; for in Scripture history is often prophecy, and prophecy is often history. There are two occasions which Pharaoh seems to foreshadow; and on both of which the like expression, so startling and impressive, is used, attributing the effect to God. The one is when Israel itself after the flesh takes the place of Pharaoh, and persecutes the Israel after the Spirit, the true children of Abraham, when God brings them out from the falling Jerusalem "with signs and with wonders," "and with an outstretched arm"; then also this expression is drawn out from the Prophets, and marked by the Evangelists.

"But though He had done so many miracles before them," says St. John, "yet they believed not on Him. . . . They could not believe, because that Esaias said, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart. . . . These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him." And our Lord Himself frequently refers to the same.

Another point to be observed in this and other like passages of Scripture is, that not only is such stated to be the case, but it is also shown that God had Himself declared beforehand that it should be so. "They could not believe, because that Esaias said." And in Isaiah the commission is expressly given to "Go and harden their hearts, make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes." The same is the case in this history in Exodus. Thus it is said beforehand to Moses, when he is first appointed to go to Pharaoh, that he is to "do all those wonders before" him, "but," it is added, "I will harden his heart." And this, viz., that God had so foretold it from the beginning, is alluded to in the passage of the text, and in other places where the like is stated, that "the Lord hardened his heart, and he hearkened not; as the Lord," it is added, "had spoken by Moses." And again, "And He hardened Pharaoh's heart, as the Lord had said." And before his going unto him it is again repeated, "Thou shalt speak all that I command thee. . . . And I will harden Pharaoh's heart," and "Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you." Thus pains are taken in Scripture not only to express this, that God hardens the heart, but also to point it out as especially God's own doing by the prophecies going before.

All this is again shown by St. Paul in the 9th chapter of Romans, where he dwells on the same at great length, referring in the first place to this hardening of the heart by God Himself in the case of Pharaoh, and then applying it to the Jews, and pointing out especially that God had beforehand foretold this His doing. We may express it in the words of the Psalmist; "God spake once, and twice I have also heard the same: that power belongeth unto God." "And all men that see it shall say, This hath God done; for they shall perceive that it is His work."

The other period on which the account of Pharaoh seems to bear is that of Antichrist; so much so, that in the Revelation, like plagues to those of Egypt are described as then occurring; and like as the magicians worked their false miracles before Pharaoh, it is said, "The spirits of devils, working miracles, shall go forth to kings." Antichrist shall come with "great signs and wonders" to deceive; it shall be with "seducing spirits." But now of those days the like striking expression is used, referring it to God, "God shall send on them a strong delusion, that they shall believe a lie." The same may apply to different ages and countries, after a manner. It has often been observed that before destruction comes on a guilty nation, there goes before a strong infatuation and a hardness of heart against warnings and judgments, so much so that it has passed into a proverb, that God sends madness before destruction.

Before entering more particularly into this subject, we may just notice this awful and impressive circumstance, that under this judicial blindness from God a change takes place before men are aware of it, so that the people of God become the people of Satan. Israel in Egypt bore the strongest stamp of being God's people: their being called out of Egypt to hold a feast or sacrifice unto God in the wilderness; their being unharmed amidst the evils of Egypt; their light amidst the darkness; the rod of Moses; the passage of the Red Sea; the Passover, and going forth at midnight in haste, the loins girded, and shoes on their feet, and staff in their hand; all these, and manifold more, are lively figures of those who are looking for and hastening unto the Kingdom of God—they are the very type and parable of the Christian Church. Strange, that while they were in the Psalms speaking of Israel and their deliverance, and especially at the very time of keeping the Passover to commemorate that event, they were themselves taking the place of Egypt, and fulfilling all that is written of Egypt and of Pharaoh. It was at the Passover, when our Lord beheld Jerusalem, and wept over it, because the time of their visitation was passed, and the things that belonged unto their peace were hidden from their eyes. They had taken the place of the enemy of God, and that under great aggravations, but they knew it not. From this instance we see what may be the case with a Christian Church or nation, that before they are aware of it they may be falling under that delusion and hardness of heart which we see has taken place in others. It will not therefore be safe to put away the case from us, but we must consider how far it may describe God's dealings with ourselves.

But our object in the history of Pharaoh is as it applies and is intended to apply to individuals; it is indeed the counterpart and strong description of those that are tried,

are borne long with, fall back after many relentings and imperfect repentances, and at last perish. It holds up to view in a striking historic picture what commonly takes place with the human soul, as it is expressed in that saying of Solomon: "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Now there is signal mercy shown to Pharaoh; the sin of Egypt had come to the full; the account begins, like that of the Jews when Christ was born, in the slaying of infants under a former king; and under this present Pharaoh the same system is carried on by oppression and heavy bondage, spoken of as the very "furnace" of affliction, "the iron furnace"; but God was long-suffering and gracious to him; He sent him first demands and expostulations, and then warnings; and these signal and repeated, and more and more manifest and awakening; and these judgments too withdrawn, and then repeated after vain repentings and fresh aggravations of sin and cruelty. Now some would suppose that Pharaoh represents the evil spirit; but it is not at all so; it is rather a wicked man, or the world at enmity with God; this is shown by his many repentings, of which there are none with evil spirits. The case may be compared with that of Judas; of him it was distinctly foretold that he should do as he did, and come to that evil end; yet nothing can exceed our Lord's continued expostulations with him, miracles wrought before him, warnings and prophecies. And it is to be noticed that in the same place where our Lord speaks of Jerusalem as having the things belonging to their peace hidden from them, He alludes to His own very earnest dealings with them in calling them to repentance. "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but ye would not." He had for three years interceded for the tree, dug about it, and laboured in vain, before His word withered up the barren fig tree. Yet notwithstanding it had been written of them long before: "Let their eyes be blinded, that they see not," "and let them not come into Thy righteousness."

But now, what are we to learn from this doctrine, that God hardens the heart? It is very true that man hardens his own heart, because Scripture says so; it is also true that God hardens the heart, because Scripture says so; yet further, it is true that this latter is worthy of much attention, because Scripture repeats it often. With regard to others, this consideration may teach us patience: with regard to ourselves, dependence upon God. Patience to others when we cannot amend them; and dependence on God in the keeping of our own heart. It is indeed of all lessons in the world the most moving and constraining, the most influential on the heart. If an accident or any ill happens to the body, to the goods or outward circumstances, the greatest of comforts is to consider that it is God's doing, to look on it as His; in like manner, when we feel or fear hardness, deadness, coldness coming over our heart, a disinclination to religion, to know that God's hand is in it will move us to turn to Him with all fear and reverence, that He may remove this plague from us, this "plague of the heart." To feel that we are in His hands for life or death, is the most salutary state of mind that a helpless creature can have; to see His hand dealing with us in judgment for past sins; to look to Him to lighten our eyes, that we sleep not in death. In a bodily disease we take all means, we watch, procure medical aid, look to food, and the like; all this is most necessary; we do so when the sickness is probably even unto death; but at such season of bodily sickness yet more needful is the constant remembrance that all is in God's hand, with Whom are the issues of life and death. It is most needful that this should be inculcated, impressed, brought home to us on such outward trials, for, as the Prophet says, "shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" But in the case of the soul, this sense of God is of itself restoration and life. "Lord, I am in Thine hands." "I am undone by Thy just judgment. My eyes are blind, so that I cannot see, and that by Thy just judgment; for when I saw, I was as one that saw not. My ears are dull of hearing, and that by Thy just judgment: my knees are weak, I have no heart to kneel, and this by Thy just judgment. But oh, Thou Who hatest nothing that Thou hast made, do Thou create and make in me a new and contrite heart." "O Lord, why hast Thou made us to err from Thy ways, and hardened our heart from Thy fear?" Oh, what a powerful and pity-constraining prayer is this, of all prayers the most appealing to God's compassion; it is like that of David, the most affecting of all in that penitential Psalm, "Cast me not away from Thy Presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. O give me the comfort of Thy help again, and stablish me with Thy free Spirit." And a still deeper sound is there in that prayer, as of one over whom

the pit were about to close her mouth, "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my prayer."

Now such are the wholesome apprehensions which may be raised in the heart by a sense of this doctrine, as it respects ourselves; if this of all punishments is the greatest, to lose the sense and power of good, and if this is God's doing, to whom shall we turn, what else shall we do but to turn to Him? "Of whom may we seek for succour but of Thee, O Lord, Who for our sins are justly displeased?" Look then on your past or present life in this light; you have done this or that sin without remorse, though perhaps it once was otherwise, and such things would have troubled you: well then, this is hardness of heart; but consider it is from God, that it is His punishment on you. Or it may be you do not do this or that which you might and ought to do, yet you are not concerned; now this unconcern is from God, it is a sign of His displeasure. How awful, yet how quickening is this reflection, it is always life and a sign of life to see and acknowledge God's hand and power. You cannot feel, you cannot amend, you cannot change. You are bound by a chain—not imposed by another, but by your own iron will. And that will is with the enemy of your soul, you will what he wills. For from evil will arose evil habit, and habit, and habit not resisted became necessity, and necessity a second nature. You have undone yourself. But reflect, the hand of God is also in this; it is He that hath given you over unto death; and He, yea—even He alone can order, even yet, that the stone may be removed, and the grave clothes unloosed; and that your dead and corrupting soul may come forth from the grave. The very thought is already like the quickening of His Spirit, and the hearing of His voice.

Now the reason why Pharaoh did not obey the commands of God, and was not bettered by His miracles, came upon him as a punishment from God. Why do you not love prayer and the Holy Communion? It is a punishment upon you from God, to Him therefore turn that He may make you love what is your life.

The ten plagues of Egypt seem to represent all the variety of evils that come on us as warnings from God; from the flies, the little annoyances and petty troubles of daily life, to the diseases of cattle and loss of the first-born, its great calamities and bereavements; from the thunder and lightning abroad and the hail-storm to that which climbs up into our secret chambers; from public judgments to private and domestic griefs; all of every kind are to recall us from sin; for "trouble springs not out of the ground," it is of God. Whether great or small, sudden or continuous, abroad or at home, it is of God: thus by little and little does He put us in remembrance; and for the most part it may be observed as in these plagues of Pharaoh, "Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished." With what a multitude of troubles like as with the flies of Egypt has your life been beset? this should teach you to remember with the good Mary that one thing only is needful. Your alienation from God has often been a "darkness that may be felt"; what a motive should there be from this judgment to consider the light and health which is in the dwellings of the righteous—in the heart which is at peace with God.

And if in the ten plagues are represented all the chastisements of God, so in Pharaoh are set forth the various shades and changes which there are in impenitence and unbelief. First of all there is rejection of God, "Who is the Lord?" and "I know not the Lord"; but he is not left, the witness of God is sent to tell him who the Lord is. And Moses coming to him so often, what is this but the many times in which the voice of God meets us? ten times, that is, times out of number. But hardened by judgments, hardened by miracles, hardened by mercies, hardened by forgiveness and forbearance of God, he brings down upon himself wrath to the uttermost. First of all he rejects the knowledge of God, and he is taught by miracles who the Lord is: and then when given to know Him by His judgments and warnings, he tries every subterfuge; first esteeming religion as idleness and folly: "Ye are idle; therefore say ye, Let us serve the Lord"; "Why do ye let the people from their works?" then he calls in the magicians, he seeks for some false semblance of religion; and then he will do any thing short of what God requires; "Ye may go, but not your women and children"; or again, "Ye need not go, ye may sacrifice in the land"; or, "I will let you go, only ye shall not go very far away. Intreat for me." Or yet further, "Ye may indeed depart"; but then recalling that permission. Such is a description of the world at work in the heart; till he who began by saying, "Who is the Lord? I know him not," shall know His power in His chastisements; shall preach Him to others by judgments brought on him-

self which he knows not in a reprobate mind, that prison of darkness in which walk the terrors of night, and in which no star is seen.

Now if the case were one where there was no knowledge of God at all, no warnings, no reproofs, no conscience, and appeals to it, then it would not come home to us in a manner so marked as this of Pharaoh's does; for here is every thing done that can be done; long-suffering, admonitions beforehand, waiting long, and again and again bearing and forbearing. This it is which most strongly characterizes the cases of God's hardening the heart: this it is which renders it so awful and impressive. So was it in every case where this hardening of God is spoken of; there are especial means taken of expostulating, warning, and the like. So was it with the old world, when God said, "My Spirit shall not alway strive with man." So was it with the Heathens whom St. Paul describes, he speaks of conscience and the witness of God long pleading with them, till he says, "As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind"; so was it with the sons of Eli, of whom it is said, that "they hearkened not unto the voice of their father because the Lord would slay them"; so with Judas Iscariot; so was it with the Jews, "Israel would not obey Me, so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts. . . . O that My people would have hearkened unto Me; I should soon have put down their enemies." So will it be with the falling away of the Church in the last days. So, alas! is it with every Christian soul that is lost. It is when God has done all, then it is that His taking away His Holy Spirit is thus described; like a binding as it were of hand and foot. As in the Parable it is said of him that had not on the wedding garment—being invited, called, admitted, honoured, made partaker of the Kingdom of grace—"bind him hand and foot," for his members belonged to Christ, but have not served Him; "and cast him into outer darkness," for being a child of light he hath not walked in the light.

Joseph

BY REV. W. HARRIS.

"How then can I do this great wickedness," etc.—Genesis xxxix. 9.

We all have in our homes household treasures of very fragile materials—such as mirrors and vases—which, not being able to bear rough handling, have their allotted place of security, from which they are rarely removed except to be carefully dusted. But there are other articles of furniture so firm and strong that there is no fear of harm coming to them from constant use; and so, without any reserve, we subject them to the wear and tear of every-day life. So, without thinking, we act upon the principle that things are to be dealt with as they are able to bear. There are characters, even godly characters, who resemble these different classes of household gods. Some are so frail that the faintest breath of trial seems to shiver them to fragments and the weakest temptation to mar their beauty, while others pass through the roughest experience of providential dealing without sustaining any injury. And God is like the careful housewife, and spares the weak souls; many of the sudden blows He permits to fall on the strong ones. Joseph is a striking example of the latter class. The nurture of a godly home had not exerted its influences in vain, he had so profited by them that he was strong enough to bear unharmed the temptations that grew out of the painful transitions of his early manhood; yea, to be more than conqueror.

I. HIS FAITHFULNESS TO MAN.

The old proverb, "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves," tells us a truth with regard to money, which Christ declares to be a moral certainty, when He says, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." If a man will not rob his master of a penny be sure he never will of a pound; and he who will do his duty to a little child unable to assert its claims, will assuredly not be wanting in fidelity to his fellow-men. Observe how the history of Joseph illustrates this principle as, step by step, he is faithful in more and more trying circumstances; that is, in circumstances bringing with them greater temptation, until he proves himself equal to this crisis of his life. First, he shows it in his father's home when, faithful to the morality of the family life, he brings to Jacob the evil report of his brothers, and thus incurs their wrath. Then he is found diligently discharging all the

duties of his lowly position as a slave in the house of Potiphar. There, as the steward of all his master's concerns, his conduct is such that "all that he had he put into his hand!" We expect to find such a man able to stand when the devil, as Luther says, "after having tempted him on his left hand, now tries him on his right." Joseph was a goodly person, and this was the medium by which Satan now tried to destroy his character. Physical beauty is a gift of God, and when it is coupled with moral beauty makes the perfection of a man; but when made to serve sin defiles itself and contaminates the soul. The sense of shame, philosophers tell us, is deeper in the woman than in the man, and we see from observation that it is so, and this is a blessing, because a woman, once fallen, is more down-trodden than a man, and because the way back to a path of virtue is much more difficult for her. Joseph endeavours to awaken this sense of shame in his mistress by a threefold appeal. First, to her reason. How can *I* do this? *I*, than whom there is none greater in this house; *I*, who have been so honoured with my master's confidence, because so faithful to his interests. How would this be consistent with my previous conduct? Then he appeals to her relationship to his lord, "Thou art his wife"; and lastly to the conscience within her, "this great wickedness."

II. HIS FAITHFULNESS TO GOD.

A man who will be faithful to his master when that master is absent will certainly be the same when he conducts his business under that master's very eye. The former conduct guarantees the latter, the greater includes the less. And if a youth does his duty under the eye of a subordinate manager in his house of business, he will assuredly do it when the eye of the superior is upon him. Joseph had two masters, one absent, the other present, and his argument is, "If I cannot do this great wickedness in the absence of my inferior master, how can I do it in the presence of my superior? God is here, Who sets our iniquities before Him, our secret sins in the light of His countenance." "The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him, but his bow abode in strength."

III. THE INCREASING STRENGTH OF THE TEMPTATION WAS MET BY AN EQUALLY INCREASING STRENGTH OF RESISTANCE.

We read of cities, both in ancient and modern times, that have resisted successfully the first assault of an enemy but have fallen at the second, or, having driven back the assault twice, have fallen in the third encounter. The first onslaught was met by proportionate resistance, but the patient perseverance outside the walls has not met with corresponding determination within. This is the record of the history of many a human soul. For a time the solicitations of the Evil One have been unheeded or overcome, but continuous and increasing boldness on the part of the tempter has won the day at last, and the man has been taken captive by the devil at his will. Samson was so vanquished, and the result was imprisonment, blindness, and an ignominious and untimely death. But Joseph is a beautiful example of the opposite. He, "strength to strength, opposed." The tempter spoke to him, "he would not hearken." Ear-gate was well defended. She spake to him day by day, "he refused to be with her," avoided her society. "Remove thy way far from her, and come not near the door of her house," saith the wise man. But at last she waxed more bold and reached to violence, "she caught him by the garment," and he fled from her, shaking her off as Paul did the viper, feeling no harm. In moral warfare there are times when to stand is defeat and to flee is victory. "Flee youthful lusts, says the Apostle to his son in the faith, "but follow righteousness"; to flee the one is to follow the other. Joseph's conduct expounds to us words of advice given long afterwards by his great descendant. "My son, keep my words," etc. (Prov. vii. 1-5.) And so he "was a fruitful bough by a well, the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

IV. VICTORY OVER SIN MAY BRING DEFEAT—FOR A TIME—TO OUR TEMPORAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

The sweetest milk may turn sour in a few hours, and guilty passion, especially if resisted, is soon transformed into bitter hatred. The very proofs of Joseph's innocence were used as evidence of his guilt. Her temper now assumes the position of virtue, and, summoning the rest of the household, produces his garment as a token of the truth of her statement. Joseph was not there to defend himself, and it is not to be wondered at that his very faithfulness was rewarded by a prison. But He Who brings to light the hidden things of darkness, and makes manifest the good and evil counsels of men's hearts, Joseph's ever present Master, in due time brought forth his "righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day." The Lord was with him in the prison, and the lying tongue of his mistress was but a stepping-stone to the throne of Egypt. It was

with Joseph, as with his Lord, false witnesses were the instruments used to accomplish the destiny purposed by God the Father.

I. Faithfulness of character is no proof against being tempted, but is proof *in* the temptation. Who was more faithful than the Son of God, yet who has ever so suffered from the temptations of the Evil One? Does a soldier expect that his breast plate will be a guarantee that the enemy's sword will not be pointed at him? Nay, but if the armour be proof the weapon will not pierce the body. Faithfulness is victory, hence the "Well done, good and *faithful* servant."

II. Character is the only lasting possession of a man. What matters it to Joseph now that he was once a slave, a prisoner in Egypt? But it is of the highest importance that he resisted the snare laid for him in his master's house; and it is his character that has brought him his world-wide reputation, a reputation that will live throughout eternity. And so with each of us, it will matter not whether poverty or riches, fame or obscurity have been our portion here, but it will matter eternally whether we have, by the inworking of the Spirit of God, wrought out a character for a blessed immortality.

Joseph

BY REV. G. F. DE TEISSIER, B.D.

"He sent a man before them, even Joseph," etc.—Psalm cv. 17-22.

This Psalm may be called a song of praise for the faithfulness of God's providence; "He hath remembered His covenant for ever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations." In remembrance of this covenant His providence wrought, and continually engaged His power in special interferences. Here is the faithfulness of God. He says, "I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." And in bringing to pass, and in doing His word and purpose, He employs human agency, and raises up one man after another in his own generation to fulfil the sure design. All may seem to be working, as it is termed, naturally. The machinery of the world, and the wheels within wheels of social life, may seem to move of their own accord, and without control; but they who "from a child have known the Scriptures," and valued them as the interpreters of the Divine mind, take their clue from what the Bible plainly tells them, and feel convinced ever more and more, that "there is a God Who judgeth the earth," and worketh among the children of men.

All the fierce jealousy and murderous spite of Joseph's brethren did but work out a part of the Divine purpose, as declared beforehand to Abraham. Therefore our text says God "sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold to be a servant: whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron," (or, as the Prayer-book version has it, "the iron entered into his soul," so great was the bitterness of his imprisonment): "until the time that His word came: the word of the Lord tried him"; or, as Bihshop Horsley renders it, "until the time that His Word came to pass: the oracle of Jehovah was the trial of him"; that is, "his interpretation of the dreams, first, of the chief butler and chief baker, and secondly, of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, proved him to be one accredited by God Himself."

The character of the patriarch Joseph is one of singular beauty. The meekness of his boyhood, the chastity of his youth, the wisdom of his manhood, and the piety which pervades his whole life, are among the very brightest examples that we inherit from past ages. The root and cause of this excellence of Joseph above most of his own day, and of our own day also, was his consciousness of the presence of God. To him Jehovah was "a God near, and not a God afar off." To him God was the guide of his youth, the strength of his manhood, the stay of his old age. One cannot wonder that Jacob loved such a son, even before his character was fully developed; for there must have been something very interesting about him even from earliest childhood. The reason of that love, however, is said to have been because he was the son of his old age. Do you think Joseph happy in his father's love? Alas! man's love cannot secure us happiness. It was no good thing for Joseph that his father so dearly loved him. It woke up the evil passions in all his brethren: "they could not speak peaceably to him"; they could not endure the sight of him. Man's love was the beginning of all his sorrows; but God's

love was the remedy for them. Let us seek first the love of God, content if He add therewith the love of man.

This love of God for Joseph sanctified his afflictions to him, and brought him through the fiery furnace, like gold, refined. He, of Whom it is written in the Proverbs that "His delights are with the sons of men," the Lord God our Saviour, was with the holy patriarch through all his life; in the pit and in the palace; in the prison and in the court; among strangers, and with his brethren. Here was the true blessedness of Joseph, that he knew the love of God; and that love was shed abroad in his heart, so that he could love Him in return.

And thus, in his consciousness of the Divine presence with him, he always refers men back to God. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" he says to the chief butler. "It is not in me. God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace," he replies to the king of Egypt. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" is the speech by which he foils the temptations of a lewd woman. "It is not you that sent me hither, but God," is the word by which he would cheer his conscience-stricken brethren. "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good," he tells them after their father's death. "God will surely visit you," he says on his own deathbed. You see how, with Joseph, God is all in all in the things of this world. With this firm faith in his heart, he threads the dark mazes of a most adventurous life. Some indeed have fixed a hard judgment on him for his appeal to the chief butler in the prison: "Think on me when it shall be well with thee; and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house." But surely they must be scrupulous indeed, who will not allow of any legitimate employment of human influence under due submission to the will of God. It is the part of the pious soul to trace the workings of Divine Providence in the good that men may do, and in the harm that they may compass: and it is the comfort of the true believer to feel assured, that while man forgets, even as "the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him," God in the love of Christ Jesus never can forget. I sum up, therefore, the character of Joseph in the words of St. Ambrose of Milan: "He was innocent in the house of his father, and patient in affliction; faithful in servitude, and chaste in temptation; had wisdom to interpret secret things, and prudence to foresee coming events; was just in correcting his brethren, and piously kind in the entertainment he gave them. In a word, as he was a lively emblem and type of the life and character of the blessed Jesus, so he is a worthy example for our imitation."

There is much in the life of Joseph remarkably parallel with the life of Christ. The hatred of his brethren, through which he became "an alien to his mother's children"; his imprisonment for upwards of two years, and consequent seclusion from the world; and then his sudden rise to greatness and glory, as second to the throne of Pharaoh; his being the saviour of his brethren, and of them that were not his kindred,—how like he is in all this to Him, Who "came unto His own, and His own received Him not; neither did His brethren believe in Him"; Who for our sakes endured to enter the dungeons of the grave, and rose on the third day to sit on high with God His Father; Who fed the famishing multitudes with the bread of life, and lived on earth to be the Saviour of the world—of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile!

But better and nobler far the likeness in his character; his meekness, purity, and tenderness of heart; his wise restraints of feeling; his forgiveness of injuries; his wisdom under difficulties; the truthfulness and piety of his life!

Doubtless to have in some sort foreshadowed Christ was an honour which they of the earlier dispensation might well have been proud of, had they understood it: to have caught from afar the glimpses of His coming glory, and to have reflected them in their own lives and conduct, was indeed a matter for great rejoicing in the spirit. But ours, O my brethren, is a nobler and a happier portion, while with open face we behold in the mirror of the Gospel the glory of the Lord, the very Son of the Eternal God, and through the graces of His sanctifying Spirit are changed into the same image, from glory to glory.

The patriarch Joseph desired to see the things which we see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which we hear, and heard them not. The figure of his noble character looms grand in the distance of past ages, but were he among us as a living man now, we should not perhaps think him so much better than ourselves. And yet, with fewer privileges and less knowledge, with the Gospel as yet veiled and Christ as yet only promised, he lived so near to God in all his ways and all his words, as to shame many

a Christian congregation before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among us.

O my brethren, while you teach your little children the story of Joseph (as what Christian parent does not?) may he, though dead, yet speak to you by his pure example, and point you to that Lord Who was with him in all his trials; to that Lord Who is of nearer kin to us than Joseph was to his brethren; to that Lord Who has a larger and more compassionate heart than Joseph could have; to that Lord Who is a mightier Saviour than Joseph could have been; to Him Whose grace it is to make all His brethren holy, even as He is holy, and to transform every believing soul from the hideous image of sin into the beautiful likeness of God; "from glory to glory," from one degree of saintly excellence, as life glides on, to another, till at last they stand before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His Temple.

Joseph

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"Joseph, who was sold for a servant," etc.—Psalm cv. 17.

The narrative of Joseph's life is the connecting link in the sacred volume between the story of a single life and the history of a people. In his day the covenant life spread itself into wider circles. In Abraham it was summed up in one man; when Isaac was born it flowed on into him. In Jacob it enlarged itself into the family; in the days of Joseph it swelled out into the dimensions of a tribe. Yet though he was mainly instrumental in this development, he was not the head of the tribe, nor was it through his line that the blessing to convey which to all nations Israel was constituted a separate people, came to the family of man. And so it is the history of the man, and not that of the tribal head, which rivets us in the life of Joseph.

He comes before us overshadowed by the great love of his father Jacob. He was the son of Jacob's old age: he was the child of the beloved Rachel. When his history begins Benjamin was too young (but one year old), to bear the great weight of that passionate affection. Still to the old man's feelings Joseph was the son of "Rachel my wife." This love for Rachel threw a golden light over the old patriarch's last years. Deep, enduring, absorbing, unselfish love, especially for those parted from us by the dark veil which separates us from the unseen world, exalts humanity. And this is always showing itself in Jacob.

Of all this great love Joseph was the natural inheritor, and in the wild Arab family which had grown up round Jacob he was the only one whose personal qualities in any way fitted him for so rich a possession. The discord, the license, the sensuality, and the cruelty which so disfigured the sons of Jacob, were but a reflection of what might have been seen in all the common life of the world around them in still darker colours. No doubt it was a great falling back towards heathendom when it is compared with the family life of Abraham and of Isaac. This was the inevitable consequence of that great curse of Jacob's life, the marriage with Leah palmed on him through Laban's treachery. The sons of that ill-matched union, of the rival sisters and their rival handmaids, had lost from before their eyes that true aspect of the life of the family which had shown so fair in Isaac's tent. To Joseph only was it shown in that strong transferred affection which almost made his dead mother stand as though still alive before him. To him that old man was ever in his tender love as well mother as father. This of itself tended not a little to elevate and purify the young heart of the motherless son. Beyond this, the father's love evidently succeeded in stamping upon the boy the impress of his own spiritual life. The distinguishing feature of Jacob's religious character was his enduring sense of God's perpetual presence with him. This stole early into Joseph's inmost spirit with the accessions of his father's love, and we shall find it reappearing at each crisis of his life as the father's grace repeated in the son.

When at seventeen years old he is suffered to leave that father's side, and begin his own life-work of tending the flocks on the low plains or wild uplands of Canaan, it is with the sons of Zilpah and of Bilhah that he is sent, as being the nearest to himself in age. But his moral sense is already above theirs; God's presence makes their youthful sins intolerable to him, and he brings unto his father the report of their evil doings.

Such a course was of itself sufficient to stir up against him the angry passions of such brothers as were at this time the sons of Jacob. Their father's conduct increased the evil. His fondness for Joseph broke out into irritating manifestations of partiality. Whilst they were habited in the ordinary dress of Arab shepherds, for the favourite son was provided the long-sleeved tunic, which in that eastern land belonged to superior rank; and all Jacob's conduct manifested the same peculiar and distinguishing affection.

These angry feelings were exasperated by Joseph repeating to them two dreams which he had dreamed. What shall we say of these dreams, and of Joseph's conduct with regard to them? Are we to take them as direct revelations, as one of those visions from God which have, we know, ere now fallen in sleep upon His servants, and ordered and guided their way? It is not said so in Holy Writ, and there is no such declaration as that God appeared unto Joseph in a dream. We are left, therefore, to gather from the context what their character was; and we cannot settle this without having some idea concerning all dreams; and not concerning dreams only, but concerning those waking visions which visit our own minds and the minds of others; which seem bred of no suggestion from the immediate present, but arise in them spectre-like and unbidden,—the clear air fashioning itself into strange forms, and the heart's silence breaking into words which to the inner consciousness seem almost articulate.

Whence come these, and what are they? Are they the mere reachings forth of our own spirit; prophecies of the future because they are the utterances of our own present capacities and deepest longings; unborn acts stirring in the womb of the imagination, and waiting their time of birth? Or are they often more than this? Are they purposes and desires of good or of evil which have been awakened up by the sweeping over the waters of our soul of the breath of the unseen enemy, or of the gusts bred of past passions; or, on the other hand, by the sweet, healing, and enlightening presence of that blessed Spirit which bloweth where it listeth? Who can read the secret of these hidden influences? Who can separate the voice of his own inner being, as original creation framed it, and as past life has moulded it, from the stirring of its sleeping chords, by the sweep over them of these invisible airs?

Here, then, we may come to some clearer idea of the true character of the dreams of Joseph. All those mighty gifts of government which his after life developed, were even now lying seedlike and half fashioned within his soul. Over that soul swept the Spirit of his father's God, ripening for perfection, and half awakening these dormant faculties; and as they were thus stirred, the busy, creative imagination caught their shapes and consequences, and cast them in their coming colours upon the receptive half-consciousness of the soul in sleep. To this half-natural fore-reaching of his spirit, the higher Spirit, we may well believe, added for him, whose after life would so greatly need such supports, a clearness of perception not its own, and which, if it was not directly prophetic, savoured of prophecy.

Such then, we may apprehend the dreams of Joseph to have been. His ready divulgence of them agrees exactly with this view. His own soul was full of them; he craved for sympathy. They prefigured he knew not exactly what. He hardly realised in the vista they opened to his eyes, that his elevation was, to a certain extent, the subjection of the rest; and so, with none of the pettiness of vanity, and very little of the chastening of prudence, he told them openly, and thus aggravated his brethren's hatred, and drew upon himself what was harder yet to bear—the blighting frost of his father's displeasure, nipping the tender buds of his yet half-formed anticipations.

Neither he nor his father could fathom the depths of his brothers' hatred. In no portion of his life had Jacob been tempted to it, and the loving spirit of his old age knew nothing of such darkness. And so, when the brethren had been some time away feeding their flocks upon the as yet unappropriated plains and uplands, the father fearlessly sends his darling to inquire after their welfare; and Joseph, unconscious of the deep grudge he had engendered, undertakes with ready dutifulness the distant mission. He goes first from Hebron to Shechem, seeking them. They were not there. He learns from a wayfarer, as he wanders about searching for them, the direction of their track, and follows them on, some twelve miles north of Samaria, nigh to Dothan. He comes upon them with all the freedom and affection of a brother's heart. But it is only to waken up, by his very aspect, from malicious lips, the evil greeting, "Behold, this dreamer cometh." Then when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, awoke the sinful consultation: "They conspired against him to slay him." There were, indeed, as is the wont of such companies, various degrees of wickedness amongst

its members. There were there men in whose tents the "instruments of cruelty" were ready. There were also the sensual softness of Reuben and Judah's uncertainty of purpose, as well as the ruder violence of more hardened offenders, who would at once "slay him and cast him into some pit, and say some evil beast hath devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Gen. xxxvii. 20). Reuben's counsel to "shed no blood" succeeds, and so they seize him, tear from him the hated vest of honour, cast him into a dry pit, and sit down to eat bread. As they make their meal, the huge forms of the "ships of the desert," the camels of the merchants' caravan, rise on their sight. A caravan of Ishmaelites is journeying from Gilead through the plain of Dothan to join the great track which passed from Canaan by Gaza into Egypt. At once the uncertain mind of Judah, trembling with horror at the thought of the great sin of leaving Joseph to perish in the pit, and yet not brave enough to propose his absolute release, seizes on the thought of a safe compromise, and proposes to sell him to the merchants of Midian. In the absence of Reuben, who had intended privily to release the lad, the sale is effected. The merchants pay for him the usual price, and carry him away. When Reuben, on his return, finds the pit empty and his scheme frustrated, he rent his clothes and cried, "The child is not, and I, whither shall I go?" Whether from the struggling of a natural pity, or from fear of bringing down with utter grief to the grave the grey-haired man at home, whose life he knew was bound up with the lad's life, he alone enters into all the horror of the tragedy. He does not over-rate the agony which was about to tear that loving heart.

They dip the vest of honour, with which it had been the old man's delight to clothe Joseph, in the blood of a kid, and with a triumph, which they cannot but give vent to in their very words, they send it to him with the lying message, "This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no." Too well the father knew it: too surely did it seem to him that he inherited afresh the sins of his youth, as he cried, "An evil beast hath devoured him! Joseph, no doubt, is rent in pieces." Many days he mourned, refusing to be comforted; and groaning forth, "I will go down mourning into Sheol, that dark land of shadows, where my son has passed before me."

Whilst Hebron echoes these groans of a broken heart, Joseph is carried down into Egypt, and finds a ready purchaser in Potiphar, the captain of the executioners of Pharaoh's house. His master's name, when read in the light which the study of hieroglyphics throws upon it, seems to make it clear that the town of On, devoted to the worship of "Ra," the sun, was the spot of Joseph's servitude. Here he wins at once, because "the Lord is with him," the favour and trust of his master, and is employed in an universal oversight of his concerns. Under Joseph's administration all things prospered. But this life of busy, honest, successful labour was not to last. His master's wife, too true to the type of old Egyptian womanhood, as every ancient chronicle depicts it, first tempts him to sin, and then, infuriated at his holy resistance to her evil will, slakes her uttermost vengeance by throwing, through a false accusation, not, as it seems, entirely believed, nor wholly disbelieved, the too faithful slave into the dungeon where the king's prisoners were bound.

That he escaped with his life from such an accusation implies, probably, that some doubt of his guilt crossed his master's mind. But it was hard, to bear without discontent and murmur, the dungeon and its cruelty, to have "his feet hurt with fetters, and to be laid in iron" (Psa. cv. 18), as the reward of faithfulness, chastity, and truth. How long he remained in the prison it is impossible to say with certainty. There and in the house of Potiphar together he spent thirteen years, probably the larger share of them in the prison. Thirteen years of training and perfecting; thirteen years in which the weeds of vanity and self-exaltation were being killed; in which faith and hope and tenderness for other sufferers were matured; in which went on the slow ripening of that genius and those gifts of conduct which were soon to be shown forth upon so high a stage of earthly greatness.

And now, when "the word of the Lord" had indeed "tried him" (Psa. cv. 19), his time came. Two chief officers in Pharaoh's household are put in ward in the prison where Joseph was bound; and Joseph is set by the captain of the ward specially to attend on these great men. How long the attendance had lasted we know not, but it was long enough to form those kindly relations which ever grew up between Joseph and those round him. Accordingly, as he waits upon them he notices one morning their saddened countenances, and with kindly youthful sympathy he asks as to their grief. They answer that they have each dreamed a dream, and they are troubled because there in the

dungeon they can consult no interpreter to tell them the meaning of the visions. The Hebrew captive's answer soars at once into a higher sphere—"Do not interpretations belong to God?" "May not He" (he suggests), "the mighty Elohim, send you an answer even by my lips? Tell me the dreams."

The chief of the cup-bearers tells his dream of restoration to royal favour, the master of the household his dream of coming doom; and both are fulfilled within three days, on the birthday of the Pharaoh. Joseph's entreaty to the chief officer of the cup-bearers, and the promise it had won of his making mention to Pharaoh of the unrighteous keeping of the Hebrew youth in the dungeon, are both forgotten in the ecstatic joy of the cup-bearer on his restoration to liberty and power, and so two full years pass on with their weary length, and Joseph, now thirty years of age, and still in prison, has spent thirteen since he was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews. But now the days of these sorrows were numbered. Pharaoh's two dreams, and his sore trouble at finding no interpreter, bring back to the remembrance of the chief of the cup-bearers the Hebrew slave of the captain of the executioners, and his true reading of the two dreams which had been told him in the prison. From him Pharaoh hears of Joseph, and snatching eagerly at the hope so strangely offered him of obtaining an interpreter, he sends for Joseph from the ward. "I have heard say of thee," begins the eager monarch, "that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it." "It is not in me," answers Joseph; "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace. God," he boldly declared, "God hath showed Pharaoh what He is about to do," and he reads plainly out to him the riddle of the night's visions. The seven coming years of plenty and the seven following years of famine are declared, and the policy of Pharaoh is marked out for him with an unfaltering tongue.

Again the question rises, which Joseph's own dreams suggested, whence was this insight he possessed into these four visions, and to what did it amount?

Looking at the records of Genesis, may we not see that God Who gave all to Joseph gave him, by means which we call natural, however unusually quickened, the intuition to read what would have been illegible to a shallower or less observant or less enlightened mind? His natural gifts had enabled him to gather first from his communion with the state prisoners whom he tended the probable restoration of the one, the probable execution of the other; to know that the birthday festival would almost necessarily bring to its final issue the fortune of each of these great court officials, and so, when the dream of each presented to his eye in airy imagery the shadow of the coming crisis, the Heavenly light fell upon its folds, and he was enabled to read it out with an unfaltering clearness. Pharaoh's dreams themselves, though they rise higher out of the region of simple naturalness in their conception, possessed the same natural tendency to self-explanation when scanned by one who evermore associated his thought of God with the events and destinies of national life, who had learned to understand the great truth that the God of all was the Lord of all, ruling as much over the court of Egypt as in the tent of Hebron. Every field would set before him the thin ears or the fruitful: every reedy pasture by the river bank, that natural image of the whole power of Egypt, the lean kine or the fat, and the cherished secret of God's holy sovereignty might link for him the coming event with the prefiguring image. As the counsel founded on the interpretation, so the interpretation itself, was full of natural insight, though quickened doubtless by the powers of a higher light. Joseph's life was full of God, and so the light of God poured into it; the sinner's life is the shutting out of God, and so his understanding becomes darkened.

With this special gift of insight the long trial of the faithful man passed away, and now dawned the day for which he had so long been trained. The Hebrew slave, yesterday a prisoner in the dungeon, by a change of fortune familiar to Orientals, is to-day Grand Vizier of Egypt, and next only to Pharaoh, its supreme autocrat. In true Eastern fashion, Pharaoh took off his ring (the mystic signet) from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck, and they cried before him, "Bow the knee." Further, he united him, by a marriage with the daughter of the prince-priest of On, to the aristocracy of Egypt. In the name which Joseph gave to her, and in the names of the two sons she bore to him, Joseph testified his resolution, even in that far land, to bind up his family life with the race of Abraham, whilst they speak of his grateful sense of God's care of him in teaching him to forget his sorrows, and in making him fruitful in the land of his captivity.

And now all his gifts of government are drawn forth into action. He goes during the

years of plenty through the land, and stores up with careful industry the fruits of the earth whilst it brought forth by handfuls. Then came the years of dearth. Egypt has always been liable to famine. A time of drought at once produced it; and as she was the storehouse of the neighbouring peoples when the same cause exhausted their supplies, they turned to her for help. So it was now. And Joseph, with a wise liberality, opened his stores for them, as well as for Egypt. He would enrich with foreign trade the land which had adopted him, whilst at home he used the opportunity to change and equalise—retaining only the exemptions of the priestly class—the taxation of Egypt.

But wider consequences were to follow from these years of famine. By Him Who in His mysterious sovereignty brings His counsels to pass through the natural acting of secondary causes, they were meant to bring down Jacob and his family to Egypt, and so prevent that mixture of the chosen family with the Canaanitish blood, which would have been inevitable if for these early centuries they had remained within the land of promise. Already Judah had mingled the holy seed with the evil race; and had they not been walled in within the land of Goshen, the separation of the race from whom Messiah was to spring would have been impossible, Fulfilling therefore, without knowing it, the counsels of the Highest, the sons of Jacob came down to purchase corn in Egypt. They present themselves before their brother, but they know him not. In dress, in language, and in manners he was now an Egyptian. The dreams of his youth in the land of Canaan are fulfilled as they bow before him. He witnesses the late awaking of their long-slumbering consciences, he hears their mutual upbraidings; yet still, even to himself, the old imposture is repeated. They tell him, with ambiguous utterance, that "one is not," and yet more plainly still "his brother is dead." The long pent-up affections of his soul are ever ready to break forth as he probes that he may heal their hearts. At length the victory is won. Benjamin is with them, and is guarded by them with all the jealous tenderness of a father's care. Then at last he makes himself known to them, and sends for the old man from Canaan, that he may himself be the stay of those last years, which, after their long sadness, blossomed out again now that the company of Rachel's son seemed to bring her presence back.

What that summons was to Jacob no words can tell save those which broke forth from that long-suffering heart: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die" (Gen. xlv. 28). Then followed the cheering vision at Beer-sheba, the "Fear not to go down into Egypt. . . . I will go down with thee; and I will also surely bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Safe in that companionship, the old man travelled down to Egypt, and when he came to Goshen the chariot of the Grand Vizier met the cavalcade. If there had been in Joseph's early aspirations something too much of a sense of personal greatness, it was gone now; there was no boast on his side, no rebuking on his father's. "He presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (Gen. xlv. 29, 30). Seventeen years longer that life lasted, and Joseph's figure is seen yet again amidst its last shadows upholding and blessed by the departing patriarch. Then he leads the great company, the chariots and horsemen, the servants of Pharaoh, and the elders of the land of Egypt, who go up with him and with his brethren to bury his father, according to his oath, in the cave of the field of Machpelah.

One more most significant outcoming of the spirit of Joseph yet remains. When the family of Israel had returned to Egypt, to live under the shadow of Joseph, his brethren, whose narrow hearts could not measure the greatness of his love, feared for themselves that the day of long-delayed vengeance might at last be come. "Joseph will hate us," groaned their evil misgiving hearts, "and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." So they feigned a dying message of their departed father, praying Joseph to forgive them. The distrust grieved him to the heart, and he wept when they spake unto him. Had he not of old bid them "not to be angry with themselves that they had sold him hither, for God did send me to preserve life"; and had he ceased to see in all that had happened to him the hand of God? "Fear not," he said, with a sobbing voice, "fear not: for am I in the place of God? . . . Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good. . . . Fear not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."

With such deeds of love his history ends. And so he too passes out of sight, living until he was an hundred and ten years old, seeing Ephraim's children of the third generation, and taking an oath of the children of Israel, "God will surely visit you,

and ye shall carry my bones from hence." So he died strong in the hope of Israel; bound to it by the ever-during bond of faith; to rise with it at the trumpet's sound from the field of Mamre, though, after the manner of the heathen, "they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." His death was like his life—hidden with God; Egyptian in appearance, Hebrew indeed; accomplished in the town of On, amidst pagan dedications to the sun, but tending to the burying-place of Abraham and the resurrection of the heir of all things. Such was Joseph: the link between the wandering patriarch and the lawgiver of nations; touching on the one side the Bedouin fathers of his race, and on the other the kings and mighty princes of the house of Ephraim. He was one who was, like all great men, far in advance of his age; as a ruler of men; as a financier; as combining together an unswerving loyalty to Jehovah with a righteous forbearance towards the debased forms of worship which he found and could not alter in the land which had adopted him; in being capable of being at once an Egyptian patriot and a Hebrew hero. In all these relations he was long before his age. The old patriarchal character broadens out into the politician and the governor of man. Of no other character preserved in all the ancient sacred record is so much told and nothing to his blame. As we dwell upon his life, it is a Christian character which opens on us. Its breadth, its purity, its justice, its forgiveness of injury, its recognising Abraham's God as the Father of all—this from first to last is eminently Christian, whilst all is based upon the ever-present sense of God's nearness to him. The motto of the whole life may be found in his simple description of himself—"For I fear God!"

Joseph and His Brethren

BY REV. ALBERT H. CURRIER.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself."—Genesis xlv. 1-15.

The familiar saying that truth is stranger than fiction never had a better illustration than is afforded in the story of Joseph. In all the qualities of thrilling interest, the most ingenious inventions of the imagination fall behind this simple story of the Scriptures. The passage which describes how Joseph at last made himself known to his brethren is where the interest and moral significance of the story culminates.

I. THE ENDURING STRENGTH AND WORTH OF FAMILY AFFECTION.

More than twenty years had elapsed since Joseph was torn from his father's house and family. From a lad of seventeen he had become a man of about forty. In the interval he had seen much, suffered much, altered much. But time and change had not destroyed his love for his father or for Benjamin, "his mother's son." It had been quickened to greatest intensity by the speech of Judah, so that he could not any longer conceal it or maintain his disguise. He had to express it and reveal himself.

There is nothing more beautiful in man than this enduring affection for those he loves. Age does not congeal it, nor death destroy it. "Many waters cannot quench it." It is a holy, perennial fire. How beneficent its influence! It begets gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forgiveness of injury, and oblivion of wrong. The most precious treasure God grants to us here on earth is when He bestows such a love upon us. To be blessed by it in life, to be fondly regretted when dead, is the highest felicity.

II. THE CONSTANT FEAR WROUGHT BY CONSCIOUS GUILT.

The tender emotion of Joseph was not shared by his brethren. His declaration, "I am Joseph," drew from them no glad expression of joy. They were silent from dismay. "His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." Conscious guilt filled them with alarm and anxious questioning. Could he ever forgive them? Since he had them now in his power, and he had become so great, would he not take vengeance upon them? Their sense of guilt had not perished or weakened with time. It was as enduring as Joseph's love. Whenever any thing went wrong with them, they fancied that it was on account of that sin. Then they recalled the anguish of their brother and their own hard-hearted resistance to his entreaties to their pity, and owned their guilt, or said to one another, with terror-stricken faces, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" And, as the story teaches us, they were right in their conjectures. Their sin was the occasion of their trouble. God brought it upon them to remind them of their wickedness and bring them to repentance. He remembers sin

also. It shapes His providential dealing with men. Because He remembers it, they are not allowed to forget it. He thrusts it upon their recollection in manifold ways. There is no oblivion from it, and there is no relief save that obtained from repentance and forgiveness, and the revelation of God's over-ruling grace.

III. GOD USES THE WICKED TO ACCOMPLISH HIS DIVINE PURPOSES.

He has chosen to connect the welfare of mankind with that of the house of Israel. He must needs, therefore, guard the house of Israel from destruction and secure for it such conditions as would preserve it from the dangers of famine, dispersion, and corruption. These were secured by means of what happened to Joseph. Because he was sold into Egypt and went thither, and was raised by God's providence in such a remarkable manner to the place of power which he held as Pharaoh's prime minister, there was abundance of corn there in the time of famine, liberty granted to the children of Israel of moving thither and dwelling in the land, a protector from outrage given them in Joseph, and the allotment of Goshen made to them as a separate dwelling-place, where they might live without molestation or contamination by association with the Egyptians. Although, therefore, the brethren of Joseph had in their envy and hatred sold him into bondage, the hand of God was in all that had happened. Joseph himself recognised the fact, and endeavoured to soothe their troubled hearts by assuring them of it. "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves," he said, "that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you . . . to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." How strange this hidden action of God's hand in the events of the world! Joseph had been sold, from malice, by his brethren into Egypt. And yet God had sent him there. It seems like an irreconcilable contradiction of facts, and yet the thing alleged was true. And our view of the world's events is inadequate unless we believe that God, in a similar way, always takes a controlling part in the affairs of men. Did this fact lessen the guilt of the sons of Jacob? Did Joseph mean that they were excused on account of it? Certainly not. Their guilt was according to their intention. As this was evil, their sin was real and needed to be repented of as truly as if it had resulted only in mischief instead of good. What they had done had wrought evil enough. It had brought great sorrow upon their father, and much suffering to Joseph, and no little harm to themselves. It had led them into a course of falsehood and deceit, and had hardened their hearts. Joseph might find it easy to forgive them, in view of the good God had brought forth from their sin; but they had no right to think lightly of it.

IV. THE WICKED FIND GRACE BECAUSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOOD.

As Joseph looked upon his brethren, he associated them with his father. They were the sons of Jacob. His blood flowed in their veins. They bore his name and likeness. They had been objects of his love and solicitude. They were his seed and heirs of the promise made to him and his fathers. As he looked upon them, also, he saw Benjamin standing with them,—Benjamin, his own mother's son, for whom his heart had yearned as soon as he saw him and on whom he had breathed the benediction: "God be gracious unto thee." For his father's sake and for Benjamin's sake he forgave them for all that they had done to him. His love for Jacob and Benjamin invested them with a grace not their own. Their father's merit and their young brother's innocence and dearness to his heart pleaded for them and shielded them from his resentment. He was willing to include them in the love and benefits which he had in store for the former. God had over-ruled their sin for Israel's sake and because they were of the house of Israel; he would, therefore, embrace them with his favour and lavish on them, and on their children, the kindness which he designed to show to his father and Benjamin. The narrative clearly and beautifully intimates all this. How delicately is it interwoven in Joseph's speech to them! "Haste ye," he said, "and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and *thy children*, and *thy children's children*," etc. What magnanimity of spirit! It was as if he had blotted out their sin and remembered it no more. And his efforts to allay and banish their fears assured them that from him they had nothing to dread.

It was a beautiful fore-gleam of the grace of the Gospel. So Christ has sought to assuage our guilty fears by speaking to us of His Father and our Father, and by owning

us as His brethren. Well is it for us that we are connected in this way by ties of relationship with the good of earth and sky. If we stood alone, unconnected with others whose prayers and merit move Heaven's favour in our behalf to give us further opportunity to repent, or which win for us undeserved consideration from our fellow-men, —who show us kindness for the sake of a father, or a mother, or a sister, or some other, —it would be far worse with us. But their merit, like charity, covers a multitude of sins in us. We are clad in a borrowed grace, derived from them, and our faults are excused and borne with, and our meagre virtues rated far above their real value.

Joseph's Brethren

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"It came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren," etc.—Genesis xxxvii. 23, 24.

The path of sin is an onward, downward course. One crime leads to another. Sins hang on to each other, as links in a chain. Among many other lessons which it teaches, the history of Joseph's brethren shows us this.

1. It was not merely from a fond partiality that Israel loved Joseph more than his brethren. We are told indeed, as one reason, that it was "because he was the son of his old age"; but we need not think that this was the only reason. Differences of character there were among Joseph's brethren, as appears from their history afterwards; some were worse than others; but, on the whole, they were all bad men, leading evil lives, companions in sin. Joseph, on the contrary, was a pure-minded and virtuous young man. We are told that "Joseph brought unto his father their evil report." He did not go with them in their wickedness. He was shocked at it. It is plain that they all, in great measure, hung together, brethren in sin as well as in blood, and that he stood alone.

2. This character, contrasted with Joseph's character, quickly produced another evil in them, forming a further link in the chain. They envied and hated their brother. The direct cause of their hatred was that their father loved Joseph best; but we cannot separate this love of Israel for Joseph from the reasons for it. He loved him because he was the son of his old age, but also for his pure and dutiful character; the brothers hated him, not only for their father's preference for him, but also for his goodness. His goodness was a constant reproof of their badness; his pureness of their vileness.

Is it not so still? Whom do bad men dislike most? Not the evil, but the good. A man may go almost all lengths in wickedness, and his companions in sin will feel no ill-will towards him for it; but a godly man they will often hate with a bitter hatred. Why? What evil has he done them? Nay, far from doing them evil, he would gladly do them good. It is not because he has done them any harm that they hate him, but because his godly life condemns their wicked ways. Alas, do they not hate the godly, because they are at enmity with God Himself?

3. This envy of the brothers *increased*. A dream which Joseph had was the cause of their hating him yet more. *His* sheaf stood upright in the field, while *theirs* made obeisance to it. Joseph told them the dream, not in pride, but in the innocence of his heart; but it offended his brethren greatly. "Shalt thou indeed reign over us?" said they; "or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?" He dreamed another dream of the same kind. The sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to him. This dream he told to his father, as well as to his brethren; and now even his father rebuked him. Yet both dreams were of God. His father perhaps, on further reflection, perceived this; for we read, "his father observed the saying"; but his brethren only envied him the more.

Envy and hatred, like other evil passions, grow by indulgence. Gathering strength continually, and becoming more firmly rooted in the mind, they turn everything into a fresh ground of offence, fasten a wrong motive on the most innocent actions, and often lead to the hatred of a fellow-creature for what does in fact come of God. The very first feeling of envy should be resisted. It is from below, not from above. He who gives way to jealousy and ill-will knows not to what lengths he may be carried.

4. Even those wicked men, these envious brothers, little thought probably to what they would be led. But Satan lays his plans according to what he knows to be the state

of the heart, and (when allowed by God) can readily provide an opportunity for gratifying hatred, and hurry the envious to yet further lengths than they had thought of. Such an opportunity came in the way of Joseph's brethren. They were feeding their father's flock at a distance, and Israel sent Joseph to see after their welfare. After some difficulty he found them. He came to them *alone*. Their father was not there to see what they did. They did not think of Him Whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Here was a golden opportunity. "Behold," said they to one another, "this dreamer cometh. Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams." Thus they plotted nothing less than the *murder* of their brother. One of them, however, Reuben, was more merciful than the rest. He kept them from shedding Joseph's blood, and persuaded them instead to cast him into a pit, meaning afterwards to rescue him and restore him to his father. The others had no thought in casting him into the pit, but to leave him there to die. We do not know that even Judah, who afterwards proposed to sell him instead, had at *this* time any other thought in his mind. At that moment the brothers were guilty in intention of *murder*, the murder of their own brother. A cruel and heartless murder it was. They turned a deaf ear to all his entreaties for mercy; they saw the anguish of his soul when he besought them, and they would not hear (Gen. xlii. 21). In their cold-blooded cruelty they even sat down to eat bread near the pit into which they had cast him.

5. They felt no pity for their young brother, while they sat and ate near the pit; but there was an eye that saw both them and him, there was One Who had compassion on him who was in the pit; the Lord, Who afterwards was with Joseph in the prison, was doubtless then with him in the pit.

Man cannot cast us out of the reach of God's compassion. In the deepest pit, His pity, help, favour, and love can reach us. Even in the pit of misery into which man's own sins have sunk him, nay, even in the pit of sin itself, the Father's mercy, the salvation of Christ, the grace of the Spirit, can seek and find him. The envious themselves, the hating, the lying, the cruel, are not beyond the reach of grace and mercy. How wonderful is the love of that Saviour Who hung on the Cross, and went down into the pit of the grave, to save us from the pit everlasting! How great is the long-suffering of God, Who bears with the hard and impenitent still, and gives them space to repent, and sends them His messages of grace, and is ready to hear their cry, and will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!

Moses

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"*My servant Moses.*"—Numbers xii. 7.

I. EARLY LIFE IN EGYPT AND ARABIA.

Of all the Jewish race, Isaiah, Daniel, and Paul included, Moses holds the first place. And indeed if we search the annals of all nations it is questionable whether there is any man who, in greatness of mind or extent of influence, can be set before the leader and lawgiver of the Jews.

For this man God provided a training as sufficient as it was singular. Born a slave; the son of a slave; condemned to death by royal decree as soon as born; rescued from a double death; sheltered beneath the roof of the enemy; the child who would otherwise have been massacred, like the babes of Bethlehem in a later day, became the inmate of a royal palace in Egypt. He was there reared in the lap of luxury and state; educated in all known learning, and in the business of a soldier. Forty years were spent in all this experience, during which childhood passed into youth, and youth matured into manhood. If he had a great future before him, God gave him an exceptionally great training for it.

At the age of forty years, an event occurred which altered the whole tenor of his life. Then, apparently for the first time, he learned that he was no Egyptian prince, and no child of the palace, but a Hebrew slave. Some one told him, his mother possibly, or his sister Miriam, the story of the river; and a slave in Pharaoh's house (1 Sam.

ii. 27), whose name was Aaron, was pointed out as his brother. He was the child of the foster-nurse to whose care he had been committed by the princess of old. This must have been terrible news. What a blow to pride; what a bitter disappointment; what a falling to pieces of all the hopes and ambitions of life! It was like death; nay, in a sense, in a spiritual sense, it was *death*. For at the same time there seems to have come to him the knowledge of God. Our authority is the statement in Heb. xi. 24, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Let us observe the two things contained in this statement: the deed, and the motive for the deed. The deed was the renunciation of his place in Egypt and the acceptance of his place as a slave. The motive for the deed was faith in God, and in what God would do for His people. We conclude, therefore, that at this time he had come to know God. He was brought to see himself a sinner, and in choosing God as his God he was brought to face another choice,—the choice of the portion of the people of God. On the one side was a great nation in the service of idols; on the other, a small race of men serving the one true God. The palaces and temples of Egypt were full of lies, wickedness, idolatry, and blasphemy: only in subject Israel was the worship of the living God. Then came the momentous choice,—to have all that Egypt could give, *with its idolatry*; or slavery, ignominy, and want, *with God*. Many voices called him back—not merely the luxury of the past, but its kindness. They had given him all, and made no conditions. Pleasure and power had been tasted as well as hoped for. The world had few fairer places and prospects than were in the hand of Moses. But he could not keep them, because he had come to know God. "He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." I am not your son! I am not a prince of the blood! I am but a Hebrew slave! Farewell for ever to this place! From to-day my part is with the people of God.

The new position which Moses assumed, as one of the Hebrew nation, soon brought him into conflict with the system of slavery in which they were held; and after the murder of an Egyptian who smote an Israelite, Moses fled from the land. Crossing by what we know as the isthmus of Suez he found his way into the heart of Arabia. Through the valleys and passes of that pastoral but desert country he wandered till he found himself in the district of a Midianite chief whose name was Jethro. He possessed herds and flocks, which fed around the base of Mount Sinai. By an act of service, similar to one recorded of Jacob his ancestor, Moses secured a position as a shepherd, and in this capacity he settled down to a new life, as unlike his old as it is possible to conceive. It was a life of solitude and of silence; a life of meditation and reflection; a life apart from man, but in fellowship with God.

II. RESISTING GOD.

But God had something more for Moses to do. It was not thus—as a lonely student of God's will—that he was to live and die. Before, however, he could enter upon the work of his after-life, there was needful *a second great turning-point in spiritual experience*. How did it begin? By God revealing *Himself* and *His Name*. "The Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush" (Exod. iii. 2). It had the appearance of fire, and it was the unapproachable light in which God dwelleth! Round every leaf of that bush the light of God was burning—that light before which the Seraphim veil their faces. Moses saw the glory of the Great I AM!

For what purpose? Not that he might continue to enjoy spiritual blessing on that lonely mountain range, or might have in his heart the peace, the rest, the joy unspeakable of which God's servants tell. No; when God gives a great revelation of Himself, it is for some great end; and He had such a purpose with Moses. For this a new stage of spiritual blessing was needed. It was a fresh crisis of experience. And what followed? First, the same fighting and rebellion that we hear of still as taking place in the hearts of the servants of God, only on a larger scale.

God called on Moses, in his new light and knowledge, to undertake a great mission; and he answered God's call by making difficulties. I reckon *eight* of these, and they are most remarkable.

His *first* difficulty was not specified, and for that reason was the more dangerous. What we are afraid to speak of is often the most perilously operative influence with us. God must drag it out of its secret hiding-place, and hold it up before us, ere we acknow-

ledge it. Moses, as he heard God's call, said in his heart, "Forty years ago I tried it. I had then great hopes. It was the dream of my life, begotten by the love of my people. But they would not have me; and now, how should I, an old broken-down man of eighty, go and lead out Israel? The thing is impossible now." He did not venture to say this in so many words, but the *thought* was there.

2. The first excuse which he openly mentioned was *humility*. "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" (Exod. iii. 11),—*false* humility, which lurks in so many souls; which answers God, "*I am too humble to obey.*" God often chooses the least and lowest to do His will; and they are apt to turn aside from their mission, as if He had chosen wrong—as if it were impossible for them to bear such a burden, or do such a work as He has assigned to them. "Who am I?" Yet surely God knows what agents He needs, and who will best suit His work; and the true humility is that which does not venture to question His wisdom or reject His choice.

3. The next excuse offered was *ignorance*. "What shall I say unto them?" (iii. 13). "I do not even know the name of God!" In reply to this, God condescends to give Moses the very word He wishes him to speak; and there are many things involved in the answer. God gives His name—"I AM hath sent me unto you" (iii. 14). Then He adds this special name—"The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob . . . this is My name for ever" (ver. 15). He puts in his mouth the very words which are to be his message to the people. So that though the messenger may be ignorant of almost all else, he knows what God would have him say.

4. But Moses has another difficulty. "They will not believe me" (iv. 1). "There is no use. I could not make a single convert among them. Their hearts are so hard; their spirits are so broken. They will not listen to me." He is concerned about the reception of his message, which is surely God's concern. And he indulges this feeling in the spirit of unbelief. He is complaining of that being in the people which is already in his own heart—distrust of God.

Very strikingly is he taught what resources are in God's power. Two miracles are done—one upon his rod, the other upon his own hand. The one becomes a serpent—simply a miracle of wonder; the other becomes leprous—a miracle of punishment. But these signs last only for a moment. The rod becomes immediately a staff again, and his hand is restored whole as the other. What an insight was thus given to Moses and to us, as to the God with Whom we have to do! The flash of a moment has opened Heaven before the soul.

5. Is it possible that more difficulties should be advanced even yet? Yes: "I am not eloquent. . . . I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (iv. 10). Moses has now got into a dangerous position. The latter miracle contained a warning which he has not taken. So here, the word probably cost him dear. He lost the possible gift of speech! Had he trusted God to furnish him with this, as needful for the work, it would have come; and the man who could write as Moses did, in prose and verse, might have *spoken* too as no other mere man ever did. God offered this power to him plainly—"I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (iv. 12).

6. But Moses refused the gift, presenting another difficulty—this time an excuse without a reason. All his arguments had broken down, but *his unwillingness remained*. "O my Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send" (iv. 13). That is, *any one but me!* There is no Hebrew less able, or less fit, than the old man who stands trembling here. It had come to this—I WILL NOT! "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" (iv. 14). Here was danger indeed. The fire did not consume the bush; but it would consume the rebellious servant. And in that moment Moses saw transferred to Aaron a large part of the honour and privilege that might have been his. Aaron was to have the eloquent mouth. Aaron was to have God's words put into his lips. "I will be with thy mouth, *and with his mouth*" (iv. 15). So the sight of God's wrath did to Moses what the light of the glory had not done. He dared not refuse, in the meantime, any more.

Thus Aaron got part of the blessing which Moses would not have. "You cannot speak, you say; but Aaron can. I will speak through *him*." What a lesson to us now; to men and women seeking consecration! Trusting God for all, He will give us all. Trusting Him for half, we shall get the half: some one else will get the other half.

7. So in the meantime there is obedience. Moses goes to Jethro, his father-in-law (iv. 18), and asks permission to go back to Egypt. Behold him, then, with wife and

family, on the way to do God's errand at last. Yet, as he goes, he becomes dimly conscious that its sacramental sign, had been kept by the people, even in their bondage (Joshua v. 5). But Moses, in his own family, had broken the covenant. His children had not passed under the rite of God. Through the opposition of the mother, they had been as heathens—"aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers* from the covenants of promise." A disobedient father could not be the leader of the people of God. "If a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" (1 Tim. iii. 5). So, at a place called "The Inn" (Exod. iv. 24), Moses is met by God and withstood, and it seems as if he must die. But the obstacle is removed, the covenant is kept, and again the journey is resumed. Leaders and workers, servants and missionaries, have oftentimes something to make sure of at home before God gives a wider commission.

8. All apparently is now ready. The meeting of the brothers takes place in the wilderness, after so long a parting, and they go together on the errand of God. First they see the people, and tell the good tidings, which are "anon received with joy"; and then they go to the presence of Pharaoh. But there are indications that the struggle in Moses' heart is not yet over, and that he half repents the task he has undertaken.

Pharaoh not only refuses the demand made upon him, but, like Rehoboam afterwards, deems that the best way to meet it is to add to the burdens of his subjects, and grind their faces to the dust. They cry out in bitterness, and accuse the two brothers as the cause of their affliction. For the first time, but not the last time, they turn against Moses as their enemy. And he, repenting, complains of God! "Wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that Thou hast sent me?" (Exod. v. 22). And again he reminds the Lord, "The children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh?" (vi. 12). Almost as if he would abandon the commission even now—"I knew it. It is what I expected; just what I said!"

Another promise, and another revelation, are the answer; and so the long struggle with his Maker is over—that struggle which is the second turning-point in his spiritual experience.

A child of God for forty years, he was suddenly called upon to occupy a new position, and undertake a new work for the Lord. But he was not willing. He resisted step by step. He had various difficulties—some of unbelief, some of unwillingness, some of fear. One by one he is forced to name them—to put them into words in the presence of the King. One by one God deals with them, it may be said, before the burning bush. Though Moses was in the dust, his shoes off, his soul trembling, even then he could fight with God.

It is a picture of what is still taking place in the soul of many a Christian, when God is calling him to something higher and better than he has yet known or done. Do we know what it is to be thus battling with God—fighting a sore and solitary fight, we and God alone? Be honest with God. Be alone with God about it. Have as little to do with men as possible. Keep close to God till the rebellion is over and the fight is done. *Till* it is done, and has ended in God's victory over us, there will be no peace or blessing. We may go back, and be Jethro's servants; or forward, and be God's. But in the one case we shall be discouraged, useless, conscience-stricken rebels against the God Who has redeemed us. In the other case, it will be again—"My servant Moses!"

III. THE CONSECRATED SERVANT.

We have seen how difficult Moses found it to accept the charge which God laid upon him; how time after time he made excuses, and struggled with God before he came to the point of consecration, at which he ceased to rebel, and put himself at the service of the Lord. Now let us see what came of him thereafter.

First of all, I find that he alone, of all Old Testament saints, is set down as occupying *the threefold position of prophet, priest, and king*. We learn from Deuteronomy xxxiii. 5, that "he was king in Jeshurun"; in Psalm xcix. 6, he is called a priest; in Deuteronomy xviii. 18 (comp. xxxiv. 10), he is called a prophet, and such a prophet that there was never in Israel one like unto him. It was a solitary position which Moses occupied. I can think of but two to be compared with him—David was a king and prophet; Melchizedek was a king and a priest; but Moses was king, priest, and prophet; and only *One* other was all the three.

The second thing that strikes me about Moses is his *special call to work miracles for God*. I dare not say that the power of working miracles was given him, for it was not his, it was God's power. But he was called to put forth his hand and make it the instru-

ment of bringing about all the plagues of Egypt. There were smaller miracles to begin with; then the plagues of Egypt; then came that mighty miracle, the crossing of the Red Sea; then the manna brought from heaven; then the smiting of the rock of Rephidim, and the scene at the rock in Meribah, when the waters came out. Elijah is often supposed to be *the* prophet of the Old Testament most distinguished for working miracles. I challenge the statement, on the ground that the miracles wrought by Moses were greater in character and more numerous than those wrought by any other man in Old Testament story.

A third thing is the *marvellous courage* that God gave to Moses—this man who trembled before the burning bush, and thought it impossible for him to do anything. What marvellous courage he showed afterwards, defying Pharaoh in the midst of his court! He had to threaten the king, and every word might be at the cost of life. Yet he went on each successive occasion unfearing as before. Even this, however, is not the greatest instance of his courage. To undertake the charge of that mighty multitude—to be its king and leader in the desert; to undertake to provide for it during the years of wandering; to be everything to it under God; that seems the greatest example of moral courage in human history.

The fourth thing remarkable is the *marvellous change in the spirit of Moses*. He was by nature apparently a man of hot blood and hasty temper. So we gather from the event which took place in his youth when he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. He had already received some intimation that God would by him deliver His people Israel: and he concluded that this deed of courage would be taken as the signal for a general uprising of the slaves. But it was a deed of blood as well as of courage: it is not thus that God works; it was of the flesh, not of the spirit, and was one of the worst works of the flesh. Now this temper, which was of the natural man Moses, was subdued and slain by grace. He became the "meekest of men," most able to bear the contradiction of sinners and the scorning of foes, "committing himself unto Him that judgeth righteously." No doubt we trace the signs of temper even in his after-life. Once he went out from Pharaoh "in a great anger" (Exod. xi. 8). When the two and a half tribes came asking for their inheritance in the east of Jordan (and they did so with great courtesy and humility), Moses turned sharply upon them, as if they wished to escape the wars of conquest, and charged their fathers also with discouraging the people (Num. xxxii. 6-8). And it was anger which led him to cry at Meribah-Kadesh, "Hear, now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. xx. 10). But these are *three* occasions out of forty years. From the hottest, grace made Moses the meekest of men. Such change can Christ make on men still.

The next thing we mark in the character of Moses is his *insight into spiritual truth*. We are tempted to do the greatest injustice to him in this respect. We are tempted to suppose that God wrote all His teaching on the mind of Moses, as He did the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone, and that Moses was a mere passive instrument; that his mind and intellectual character had nothing to do with the reception of the truth. It is a total mistake. The inspiration of Moses went side by side with the inspiration of Paul. Moses was spiritually taught by God as Paul was. Moses was enlightened by the Spirit of God to see God's mind with regard to all the injunctions and ceremonies, and statutes, and judgments, and laws that he laid upon the children of Israel. To such an extent was he enlightened and instructed, that there may be said to have been no comparison between God's teaching of this man and of any other man in Bible story.

Then from insight into the truth, we come to the *extraordinary communion* which Moses had with God. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10). Do we not envy Moses that he had so much to do with God in the guiding of Israel; that he had to go to Jehovah every hour to ask Him how this or that was to be done, and how His people were to be managed? Moses had such business with God that he could never be away from Him. But if we were taught of the Spirit, we should find as much occasion to be with God as Moses did. It was not the multitude of business merely that led him into that communion. Of him God says, "My servant shall speak with Me. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches" (Num. xii. 8). In that strain and connection these remarkable words occur, "And the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. xii. 8). What was that? It was Christ; for "no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John i. 18). This similitude of God which Moses was to see was manifestly

Christ. Whether there be an allusion to the future, when Moses was to see God in glory in Heaven, I know not; but the statement points to one of the secrets of this special communion that distinguished Moses from every other man. We must not forget that Moses was indulged with such a sight of God's glory as no one else ever had. We read of three distinct times that Moses looked on the glory of God. The first, when he stood before the burning bush and saw the flame of fire. The next was during the first forty days in the wilderness (for Moses was on the mount twice, forty nights and forty days on each occasion). Observe how he was employed. In the Book of Deuteronomy he tells us himself he was in prayer all the time. "I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights" (Deut. ix. 18). He was engaged in prayer all the time before God on his face.

After he had prepared the tables of stone, before he went up the second time, he said, "Show me Thy glory." We are told the wondrous story, how the Lord passed before him and showed him the Glory for the third time (see Exod. xxxiii. 18; xxxiv. 1-8). When it appeared in the cloud in the Shekinah, Moses saw that also; but it was an entirely distinct thing when Moses saw the "glory of the Lord."

IV. THE SIN OF THE CONSECRATED MAN.

I know of no mere man in the Bible of whom we do not read some sin or failure: not one. And in this respect Moses was no exception. The sin of Moses, the consecrated man, was a remarkable one; it was a double sin. He broke *both* tables of the law. He sinned in these later days against his neighbour, and against God. The sin against his neighbour is called "Meribah," that is "strife"; the sin against God is called "Massah," that is, "the temptation of God." What was the sin against his neighbour? He lost his temper and reviled the people. Mark that it was the old sin which had been put aside and crucified, and had passed out of sight, which again overcame him. Where he thought he was safe and out of danger, that was exactly the place where Satan assailed him.

What was the occasion of his losing temper with the people? It was their sin against God. He was wroth that, after all God had done for them, they could treat Him as they did; and so, before the gathered multitude, he broke out into reviling. "Hear now, ye rebels: must we fetch you water out of this rock?" But on this occasion he sinned against God also, notably, mysteriously, and, *though he knew it not*—for it was largely a sin of ignorance—awfully. He broke the type of Christ! He was told to speak to the rock, and, in the heat of his passion, he forgot his instructions, for that must be the reading of his action, I presume. I cannot suppose that, with deliberate intention, he took another course than God had prescribed. But he so lost command of temper that, forgetting himself and God's word, he struck the rock three times with his wonder-working rod. He had before struck one in Meribah, and now he strikes the other in Massah. How mysterious and awful the sin! For, let us call to mind what that rock signified. St. Paul tells us "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4). Now on the first occasion when Moses was to bring the water of life from the rock, God said, "*Strike!*" It was only by striking the rock that the water of life could come from it. But once stricken—*once stricken*, the water would thenceforth flow from it *at a word*. To strike the rock twice was striking twice that which was the symbol of Christ. It was, in symbol, to crucify the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame. Christ suffered only once,—He cannot be crucified again; but the action of Moses in forgetting, and so disobeying God, put him in the position that he almost destroyed for the Church of the living God the symbolical meaning of the smitten rock. So we see how awful that sin of ignorance was into which this servant of God fell through hasty passion.

What then was the result? He could not "enter in." God visits on the sins of sanctified persons in this life a deeper punishment than on any other, because they know what they are sinning against, as none other can. A Christian's sin means ten times what a sinner's sin does. The sin of the consecrated soul—with what characters does the recording Angel write that story in the book?

Moses is, alas! the great outstanding lesson of how severely God must punish the sin of His people. That transgression at the rock, in which Aaron also took part, closed the gate of the promised land against the leader of Israel. Brought to the very threshold; with nothing but Jordan between; permitted to see it, in its length and breadth, he must die without setting foot upon its soil. Though he earnestly prayed that this decree might not be final, God silenced the prayer (Deut. iii. 26, 27), "Let it suffice thee:

speak no more unto Me of this matter. . . . Thou shalt not go over this Jordan." There was no more to be said.

So, as we read in Deuteronomy, he "went up . . . to the top of Pisgah . . . And Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there, . . . and God buried him in a valley in the land of Moab" (xxxiv. 1, 5, 6). Some have questioned whether he did die: but it is affirmed, I think, no fewer than eight times in the record, as if to leave no doubt. And his resting-place was hidden. "No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (ver. 6). He died in Horeb, in solitude, somewhere in the mountains of Moab. No one saw it. No one was there. And it is an exceeding tribute to the greatness of this man, to his overshadowing name among the people, that his grave was thus hidden, lest his bones should have been worshipped. No man knoweth it—to this day.

There is one more remark to be made, that, *with one exception, Moses is the only man of whose eternal glory we get a glimpse in Holy Scripture.* Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory" (Luke ix. 30, 31), in the glory that they are having now with God. While in olden time it was only the skin of Moses' face that shone as he came down from his forty days' communion, here his whole body is seen shining with the light of God reflected from him. How is it that these two men stand out from all others, and are exhibited to us in the triumph of Christ at the Transfiguration? Whatever other reasons there may be, certainly this is one,—to hold them up before the Church as having in their position and character been examples worthy of our imitation.

You observe how the olden curse laid upon Moses because of his sin was taken away in the Paradise above, where "there shall be no more curse." He who was forbidden in his mortal flesh to enter the land of promise was permitted to enter and to stand in it at the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Observe, further, what he is doing on the Mount of Transfiguration. He is talking with Jesus. He had communion with God long ago, but now he meets God incarnate and manifest in the flesh. He came with Elijah and found Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. And what communion was it that occupied his mind and soul, and made his whole being shine? It was the decease of Christ, called in Luke "*the Exodus*," which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Calvary was the theme which was uppermost in the hearts of these two men. That was the subject which in all their experience of God, and man, and human history, meant most to them. The thing they desired most was to hear Jesus tell what Calvary was to be, and why. What a signal honour for "My servant Moses!" He was, we might almost say, transfigured like the Lord Himself. May a similar blessing come to us all! "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," may we be "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord!" Is it not possible in a measure even now? Seeing the glory of God, communing with the Lord as to His decease already accomplished, shall not heart and life shine from that communion, like the face of Moses, with the light which comes from Him?

Moses

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"*He sent Moses His servant.*"—*Psalm cv. 26.*

"It shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light" (Zech. xiv. 7). The working of God in Time is evermore, from generation to generation, the fulfilment of this promise. It is when the hour is darkest, when sorrow is heaviest, when hope is dying, when the clouds are thickest, and the hollow moaning of the voice of despair is beginning to awake upon the dull night breeze—it is then that He interferes to Whom Time is not, save as the setting wherein He has been pleased to place His work.

So it was, eminently, when Moses was born to be the deliverer of the children of Israel. The darkness of the clouds which veiled their sky hardly could gather into a deeper blackness. They had long lost the peaceful security of the land of Goshen. There they had multiplied with the unusual increase God had promised to their great forefathers, until they became a terror to the jealous people among whom they tarried. The fame of the great Vizier of their race, before whom Egypt had bowed, had passed

away. The internal troubles of the land, the changes of dynasties, and the vicissitudes of events had almost swept away his memory, and long ago another king had arisen who knew not Joseph. What if these Syrian herdsmen were to join with some Arab tribe and subjugate the whole land? This was the ruling terror, and it must be guarded against with all the subtlety of Egyptian policy. One of these guards was found in depressing them to the rank of slaves; in breaking up their sense of independence and nationality, and thus bowing the neck betimes. Another resource was to reduce their numbers by the slaughter of their male children. Both were practised. To the eye of sense the old promise seemed dying out. The fertility of which it spoke had brought their doom upon them, whilst a slavish heart was rapidly being bred within their bosoms. The leeks and the cucumbers, the flesh-pots and the abundance of their store—for these they were growing to long; and their softened, debased spirits bowed to the oppressor's rod, and did, with an abject obedience which their rugged ancestors would have spurned, the foreign tyrant's bidding.

There is no harder task for any man than to rouse up again into life such an expiring national spirit. Woe to him who attempts it, and wavers or fails in his endeavour—the oppressor's utter hatred, and a timid and treacherous abandonment by those whom he has stirred only to bring on them a heavier servitude, is his inevitable end.

This was to be the work of the son of Amram; for this he was born of the family of Levi; for this God's electing purpose had from eternity designated him; for this, in time, God's providence wrought in secret ways to fit, furnish, and perfect His servant. He to Whom all things are open, saw that the time was come in which His promise to Abraham should begin to stir towards its fulfilment. He knew that the character of the reigning Pharaoh was that which, by the mingling of obstinacy and fear, was tempered to be the passive instrument of His high designs, and so provided in Moses the fit agent of His will. As under Joseph the family had grown into a tribe, so under Moses the tribe was to be raised into a republic. The formation of such a character as was needful for the fulfilment of the leader's after-work required a long and most varied fashioning—we may read it in the lines of the prophet's life.

Saved from the destruction of the male children of his tribe by an incident familiar to Egyptian life, and a caprice characteristic of an Eastern woman, Moses is brought up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. For forty years this was his life.

He was great, learned, and powerful. There lay before him a future of unlimited earthly splendour. He had the burning aspirations which belong to genius. What would be his course? Was he, a son of Abraham, the friend of the personal God, to sink down into the defiling superstition of Egyptian idolatry? Was he to forget the holy seed, and mingle himself altogether with the family of Mizraim? Was the bond that held him to his princely foster-mother as strong as that which bound him to the seed of Israel? So the Spirit of the Lord whispered to his inward ear, and he hearkened to it. "He went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens." The old hieroglyphics help us to realise the scene. In them we see fixed in yet remaining figures, the hard and bitter labours of the enslaved sons of Jacob toiling in the brick-field beneath their Egyptian overlookers, who are armed with rods of chastisement, and are exacting without pity the exertions which were designed quite as much to bow the spirit and even reduce the numbers of the serfs as to add to the riches of their masters.

It was a great and noble choice that he was led to make when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Herein, doubtless, that divine germ of faith, which was struggling for its birth within his great but as yet unpurged heart, was reaching forth far beyond his own consciousness. The breath of the Divine impulse which fell upon him, mingled with, and for the time seemed lost in, the storm of a mere earthly ambition. Uncalled, uncommissioned, unstrengthened, he yields himself unconsciously indeed to the Divine leading, but consciously only to the impulses of his own great heart. The favoured son of the servile race goes out from his palace ease and mingles himself with the sorrows of the oppressed. He has but a doubtful welcome. Slavery is an utterly debasing element in human life—debasing both to the master and to the slave. Fear, suspicion, jealousy, meanness—these are bred, as evil creatures breed in filth and darkness, in the slave's heart. They dare not, they will not understand their champion; and when he rescues even by violence a suffering brother from the tyranny of the Copt, and is doing the act of liberation with the inherited vehemence of a son of Levi, slays the Egyptian, he

only awakes against himself the murmurs of his tribe, and is driven by their narrow-hearted and obstinate rejection of their prince to fly from Egypt.

That flight from Egypt had in it the elements of faith. For it was "by faith he forsook Egypt; not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). "By faith," beginning to teach him that not by his high place in Egypt, that not by his learning, that not by his power or might or resolution, but that by God's arm, in God's way, at God's time, the deliverance he longed to work, but had so failed in working, should be accomplished. He left the mighty unfulfilled design, which with too great human heat he had sought to accomplish, in the hand of God, and at the leading of His providence abandoned all his high designs to bury himself afar from all the stir of Egypt's life in the life of a wanderer and an exile. He seeks a shelter in the land of Midian amongst the Abrahamic tribes sprung from Keturah, and instead of the busy life of a courtier, a politician, and a tribune of the people, he associates himself to the pastoral pursuits of the dwellers on those Sinaitic ranges, which would support no larger animals than the flocks of their innumerable sheep. The natural sinking of that bounding spirit must have been profound. Hopes suddenly dashed; high desires burnt out and choked in the deadness of their own ashes; the sadness of separation from his brethren; the aimless uselessness of what he had dreamed of making a more than imperial life—all lay heavy on him. The name of his first-born son still mourns on our ear, charged with the record of this utter sorrow. "Zipporah bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom (Banishment), for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land" (Exod. ii. 22).

Yet it was not all sorrow. It was a sharp discipline through which he was passing, but it was the discipline of God. We may even read its progress in the name he gives to his second son. There is a certain tinge of bitterness in the "Banishment" which breathes through the name of Gershom; but in Eliezer, the second, "My God is an help," we may measure something of what he had learned whom God was training. That fiery Levite spirit was being duly attempered; that longing to use for the redressing of wrong the arm of flesh was being curbed; that lofty estimate of what his natural powers, his high attainments, and his pride of place might enable him to accomplish, was being brought down to the far stronger basis of a self-distrusting humility.

In the midst of this life which had spread its level, unvarying outline over forty years, the call of God suddenly aroused him. In the wilderness of Midian, at the foot of that great mountain of Horeb which was to be hereafter "the mount of God," the old dry river-courses filled again with the heavenly stream; the old voice which had called Abraham, and directed Isaac and comforted Jacob amidst his many troubles, woke up to give his great commission to Moses. The strange sight of the thorn-tree of the desert, instinct with fire and unconsumed, at once invited the curious investigation of the man to whom Egyptian science had opened all the then known secrets of nature. "I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt" (Exod. iii. 3). But as he draws near to gaze, a greater wonder than any which nature could display arrests his inmost spirit. Whether it was then given him to read the riddle of the sign we know not. Whether it was still to him but a burning bush, or whether in the dwarf thorn amidst the forest trees he read the form of suffering Israel, penetrated everywhere by the living fire of their fathers' God, purifying but not consuming the race He was searching with His judgments and upholding in His love—whether then or afterwards his eye read that parable of providence, we know not; but from that bush we know that the voice spake to him, called him by name; bid him put aside in humble adoration the shoes from off his feet, and filled him with such a sense of holy awe that he sank astonished at the manifested presence of the God with Whom these forty years he had been walking. He whose educated gaze had known no fear in looking at the strange natural phenomenon of the burning, unconsumed thorn, trembled to the centre of his being at this revelation of the nearness to him of God; and "he hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exod. iii. 6).

Then to that awe-struck spirit was given the commission which with mere earthly heat he had reached out his hand to seize some forty years before. Now the sufferings of Israel were accomplished. God had heard their groaning, and looked upon them, and had respect unto them (Exod. ii. 24, 25). What words of wonder embodying, what stores of consolation for all after-generations of suffering humanity, until the last taskmaster is cast out, until the last son of Abraham is made free of all his inheritance, until Egypt has given up to Canaan the last weeping exile, are those of the deliverer's com-

mission!—"I have surely seen the affliction of My people—I have heard their cry, I know their sorrows" (Exod. iii. 7). This was the utterance of his fathers' God to him who long ago had dreamed of delivering his brethren. And now the dream was to be fulfilled. He receives at once his commission: and how different now from what it once had been is the voice of that trained heart! Instead of "supposing," uncommissioned, that "his brethren would have understood how that God, by his hand, would deliver them" (Acts vii. 25); now, even with the direct commission which interpreted to him and authorised all the long-cherished aspirations of his soul; with the "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. iii. 10)—he shrinks back with a humbled sense of his own unfitness for being God's instrument. "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" The long training had done its work. The heated iron of his natural impetuosity had been hardened in those cold waters of his banishment, and the tempered steel was fitted for the mighty emprise for which God would wield it. The path by which he is led is wonderful even to himself. The name of God has been revealed to him; the promise of God's presence has been made sure; his bashful self-distrust turns into a growing confidence in his God; and at last, as one who trembles at the venture, and yet fears still more to disobey, he accepts the high commission, and prepares to be and do and suffer whatsoever the Heavenly Wisdom shall have ordered for him.

One other merciful assistance is granted to him before he is called on to endure the last appalling trial of his courage—his standing before Pharaoh. Having left his wife, with her children, at his Midianitish home, he sets out from Jethro's house, as forty years before he had come to it, a solitary man. But at the roots of Horeb he meets his elder brother Aaron, the future partner of his mighty cares. What a meeting it was! The great prophet lawgiver and the great high-priest of the future—with that gap of forty years in their lives to bridge over with long histories of the past, with the loving greetings of the present, with so much to tell and so much to hear, with such recitals of the wonders God had wrought already, such hopes from His great promises, such fears from the threatening aspect of the darkened sky, with its canopy of cloud, and all that it might contain for them in the unknown future. So they travel into Egypt, lonely wayfarers, with high resolves, with Egypt's and Israel's and the world's future waiting on their course.

The first work there is for the brothers to call together the heads of the family of Israel, and announce from God their coming deliverance. The suffering people hear with thankfulness that their God has remembered them, and "believe; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped" (Exod. iv. 31).

The next message of the prophet-messengers is to Pharaoh himself. Without reserve or fear they speak their summons, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let My people go." The king's reply is the natural answer of an irritated self-will to such a summons. "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" At once, from those lately stammering lips of the messenger of the King of kings, the voice of a sovereignty asserting its supremacy far above the throne of the haughty Pharaoh, spake out its warning, "The God of the Hebrews hath met with us,—let us go, lest He fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword." And now the strife between Jehovah's messenger and the great earth king was indeed begun. So far as Moses was concerned, it would have been ended in an hour, if Pharaoh had dared to drown the prophet's voice in his blood. But such an act was prevented by the state of Egypt. It was shaken to the centre by the power of the Canaanitish population which had settled in it. To provoke them to immediate rebellion by violence towards their chief would have been a dangerous policy. For they might be succoured by the Syrian tribes who still, as the seed of Abraham, retained some ties of affinity with the children of the eldest branch of their now wide-spread family. Pharaoh therefore spared the life of Moses, but sought to alienate the children of Israel from him by making their yoke heavier, so that they might rise against him as having by his interference only increased their sufferings. To a great degree the deep device succeeded. The suffering people groaned to their deliverers, "Ye have made us to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and of his servants, to put a sword into their hand to slay us."

Here was for Moses the first experience of that utter unthankfulness in his brethren which so often in the forty years which followed made his life a burden to him. Yet

this time so true was the complaint that he returned unto the Lord and said, "Wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou hast sent me; for since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name he hath done evil to this people, neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all." To this intercession, as to so many afterwards from the prophet's mouth, the Lord hearkened; He renewed His promise: He raised the fainting spirit of His faithful servant, and He bared His arm against the persecutor.

Then began that series of ten plagues by which at the last Egypt and her king were bowed and conquered. They began, as all God's judgments do begin, in the muttered and distant thunder of the voice of warning; they passed next into the crash and peal of instant sentence: this, in its first execution, touched but lightly those who would not be warned; next it hemmed them round in ever-narrowing circles; until at last, in the death of the first-born, it closed indeed in blackness and desolation upon the very heart of Egypt.

Never once throughout this awful strife of the great earth king with the unseen Lord did His prophet faint or falter; condemned at first, then flattered and cajoled; then threatened, and at last driven with violence from the Royal presence, he, with a hand which never shook and with a voice which never trembled, stretched forth the rod of power and spake the word of judgment.

But when the conflict was over and the victory won, and Pharaoh and his host drowned in the depth of the sea, the trials of the great messenger rather began than ended. To lead forth indeed, as it was given him to do, a mob of slaves, debased as slavery only can debase humanity; sunk below the dead level of pagan Egyptian civilisation; to form them into a daring army, a free commonwealth, and a believing Church; to be exposed to all the ready and violent vicissitudes of their desires, and hopes, and fears, and so to have to suffer their manners in the wilderness; to have them upbraid him for their very deliverance when their sensual natures lusted after the flesh-poison of Egypt; to have them talk of stoning him when the wells were dry; to have them dispute with him for his command, and rebel against his rule; to have them break their covenant with Jehovah, and turn to the sacred calf of their old Egyptian oppressors—all this was such a burden as was never laid on any other.

Yet such had been his training, such was the grace given to him, that but once throughout these weary forty years of daily-renewed trial and vexation did his faith fail. Under strong temptation his natural heat of spirit for once broke through the long-established control under which it had been brought. This is spoken of as the root of his offence. The ceaseless provocation of the rebellious people "angered Moses at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with him for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips" (Psa. cvi. 32, 33). When anger ruled his heart, even his firm faith fainted. The people were mad with thirst. God had bidden him speak unto the rock before their eyes, and promised that at his word it should give forth the needful supply of water. But for once he distrusted the command of God. He had known before this that the rod of God could bring forth water from the rock. Merely to speak and call for the hidden springs was a new and a yet stranger act of power. He looked upon the wild faces of the angry people; he felt the general murmur rising into a roar of madness; he heard the fierce cry of the leaders, "Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt into this evil place, where there is no water to drink?" and for once his lion-heart sank within him. "What," unbelief whispered, "what if thou shouldst call, and call in vain?" And so, half doubting, and yet half believing, instead of speaking to the rock, he smote it twice with the rod, the power of which he had already proved. The faithful God would not forsake His servant even in that hour of his weakness. The waters in their deep spring-head obeyed the uncommanded summons, and gushed forth in abundance, and the people drank and were filled. But the sentence of the righteous Lord was spoken, "Because ye believed Me not . . . therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

And so he, the greatest of the whole prophetic line, he to whom God spake as He spake to no other—he too fell. One only on the whole stalk of humanity unfolded into the perfect flower; one only, "the intercessor" for Moses, as Moses interceded for Israel, could say to the Father, "The Prince of this world cometh, and hath NOTHING in Me."

Of that one Righteous Man amongst all the prophets, Moses was the chiefest type. The voice of God Himself declared his pre-eminence over all the prophetic line. "If there be a prophet among you," etc. (Num. xii. 6—8). All the deep meaning of this

wonderful declaration it is impossible for us to fathom. It was fulfilled when, on the summit of Horeb, the cloud which shrouded the insupportable brightness of the Divine Presence, and out of which came "the Voice" declaring the name of the Lord, swept solemnly by the longing, shrinking prophet. Then doubtless there was an immediate manifestation to his spirit of all that it was possible for fallen man to sustain of the majesty of God.

So, again, it was, in the long sojourn in the Mount; in that dwelling in the brightness of God's glory which left a lustre on his own countenance; in those mysterious communings in the separated tent, the entrance to which the pillar of the cloud had closed to all beside him, and where were given to him the separate directions of the law, as on the Mount, had been showed to him the patterns of the tabernacle worship. Language cannot rise above the words of wonder in which these last communings are described—"As Moses entered into the tabernacle," etc. (Exod. xxxiii. 9-11).

A most fit emblem, moreover, was he of the one great Prophet, in his intercessions for Israel,—intercessions based upon his renunciation of himself for his brethren. In all of these most descriptive lines of his figure, we may trace the forecast shadow of "that Prophet that should come into the world" (John vi. 14), of Him of Whom the promise, which waited fourteen hundred years for its accomplishment, spake in the days of Moses to Israel—"I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth" (Deut. xviii. 18). In the view of all this greatness, it is the direct record of inspiration, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10).

Here, as in so many other instances, we may note that the highest prophetic gift is not the mere predictive faculty (though that, too, played around the lips of Moses in his blessings and his songs), but the bearing the message of God to man; the being the witness to the fallen race of the presence, care, righteousness, truth, and love of the Almighty King.

Such a witness Moses bore for forty years, throughout the long wanderings of the wilderness, to that stiff-necked generation. He gave them Jehovah's law, he instituted for them their appointed worship, he lived before them the prophet lawgiver of Israel, he fulfilled his mission, and then the time came that he should enter on his rest. In the record of the Book of Deuteronomy, he mounts alone at God's bidding, and with His sole companionship, from the plains of Moab unto the top of Pisgah. Thence the Lord showed him all the land, and said unto him, "This is the land which I swore unto Abraham . . . I will give it to thy seed. I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." And now, the last prayer breathed, his work done, the last sight seen on that mountain-top, far above the sounds of earth, the solitary man lies him down, in stillness and in light, to yield up to his Creator and Redeemer the great spirit which he had so richly trained through manifold discipline and unequalled Heavenly communings. No hand of man closed those sinking eyelids; no tool of man dug that unknown grave, or traced over it an earth-born memorial. From first to last, God and he were alone together. "Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab," etc. (Deut. xxxiv. 5, 6).

Moses

BY REV. EDWARD N. PACKARD, D.D.

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro," etc.—Exodus iii. 1-12.

"Now Moses." So this wonderful history begins with the name of a great man and the story of his summons to his great work; the man providentially prepared for the hour and brought to the front at the precise moment designated in the course of Providence.

I. THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CALL.

When this scene on the mountain occurred, Moses was eighty years old. Forty of these years had been spent at the Egyptian court, and forty out in the wilderness among the sheep. He might have expected, after so long a delay, that life was to offer nothing more to him; that he was quietly to pass into his old age and be gathered to his fathers

without seeing the salvation of Israel. Still we may believe he maintained communion with his Maker and meditated, as he led his flocks from pasture to pasture, upon Him Whose goings forth had been of old, even from everlasting.

Then his time came. Life suddenly was to change its entire complexion. God was to place him in the foremost position, expose him to extremest perils, throw mighty burdens upon his heart, make him leader, organizer, law-giver, and founder of a nation through whom at last the Desire of All Nations should come.

The silence of Scripture upon these eighty years is significant and characteristic. One act alone, at the middle point in the period, was decisive. Seeing an Egyptian beat a Hebrew, he rose up and slew the oppressor, expecting, no doubt, that one bold stroke for freedom would rouse the whole people. It was an error like that of John Brown in the days before the war of the rebellion. Israel was not ready to be delivered, and Moses was not ready to lead them out. He must go to school forty years more, choosing affliction with the people of God rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season; and so we read: "By *faith* he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible."

He goes down from his high place and is lost to sight for more than a generation. He marries, not happily; calls his first son "Banishment," and the second, "God my help." This is about all we know of him until the day of his appearing before God at Sinai. His miraculous escape in infancy; his careful training in the court of Pharaoh; his knowledge of governments, men, armies, religious rites; his silent years of obscurity, watching the leisure of the seasons as they came and went, the slow movements of the stars; the care of God for the helpless creatures over which he was a shepherd; the home-life,—all these were a part of the call. His soul ripened.

II. THE CALL ITSELF.

First of all, his attention was absorbed by a wonderful sight which in a measure prepared him to receive a communication from God. A bush burned before him, and, as he turned aside to watch it, the green leaves and boughs and stalk retained all their form and colour, while through and around them a thousand tongues of fire leaped into the still air. It was a summons to him and a symbol of the very people he was to go forth to deliver, in the midst of the flames of persecution and sorrow, yet unconsumed because of One Who dwelt in the bush—the redeeming Jehovah.

Then Moses is called by name and knows that he alone is addressed from the unseen world, just as Samuel later on was to be spoken to in the silence of the night, and Saul of Tarsus on the highway.

This is followed by an invitation to draw near, coupled with the word that told of the holiness of Him Who was about to communicate His will. The two always go together: "Draw near!" and "Be still, and know that I am God." Even in these days, when we have an Advocate with the Father and He is brought near to us to receive the breathings of child-like love and free petition, we need to remember that the place where we meet Him is holy ground.

Next we come to a revelation of God's character and purposes. We must have a new translation of the Divine Name before we are fit to undertake any thing new in His service. This appears abundantly if we look at the history of the great movements in the Kingdom of Heaven. Some elect soul has caught a new vision of God, and through the strength of it has gone forward, inspiring others with a contagious faith. Here we are interested to see that the appearance of God is described in three distinct terms. The "Angel of the Lord" appears in a flame of fire out of the midst of the burning bush, and when "Jehovah" saw that Moses turned aside to see the sight, "God"—another word for the Divine Name being used in the Hebrew—spoke to His servant and called him by name. This "Jehovah Angel," so often appearing at critical moments in the Old-Testament history, is identified with Jehovah in many places and again spoken of as a distinct person. It has been thought by many interpreters that Jesus Himself was anticipating His incarnation by thus appearing at sundry times, and in divers manners, to the fathers, shadowing forth the fuller manifestation in the flesh; and we should be more sure that it was so, were there any allusion to the fact in the New Testament, where all the earlier revelations are so fully declared.

We observe further in what character God will be known to Moses after the outward sign of His presence had arrested his attention: not as the "Creator of the ends of the earth," but as the God of a sacred history; the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; One to be remembered for what He had done for the children of men; no distant and

awful Deity to be appeased and worshipped for His greatness and power, but the household, fatherly, near One, on Whom ancestors had called and been heard.

But the new announcement of the name, and the sweep over the past history of His mercies, was not enough. Abraham's God has been remembering Abraham's children. They had forgotten Him too often, but not He them. As they had bowed to their tasks, He had watched them and heard the crack of the master's whip. When they groaned out their sorrows, He had been listening night and day. When they staggered, fainted, and died in the broiling sun, and their bodies were rudely thrown into the earth, He marked the spot. He says to Moses: "I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them." How many times in the bloody and dark days of the persecutions of His people has He known their sorrows! And we may ask, does He take my sorrows up into the ocean of His loving thoughts? count my tears and treasure them up in His bottle? Yes, all is known to Him; all is remembered by Him; all will be brought back to add to the joy of that morning when we shall awake in His likeness and be satisfied.

In the declaration that He will take His people to a good land inhabited by heathen tribes of great power, there is no allusion to it as the old inheritance of His people; but if we return for a moment to the closing verses of the last chapter, we shall find it said that when the distress of Israel increased, God remembered His *covenant* with Abraham, or, in other words, His promise to give to the patriarch and his descendants a home in Canaan. It is not impossible that the description of this land as being in the hands of the enemy was calculated to show the difficulties to be overcome in the deliverance of Israel and the conquering force of faith in the word of the Almighty.

Thus Moses has been arrested by the sight of a great miracle—a bush burning and not consumed; he has heard his name called; has been told that the ground whereon he stood was holy because God was there to make Himself known; he has had a new view of God in His covenanted love for His people and His deep sympathy with them in their afflictions; he has been told what the Divine purpose was—to bring up the people to their promised country; and now it remains for the trembling and astonished shepherd to hear the orders addressed to himself. First, God shows Who and What He is and what He will do; then He declares to Moses what *he* must do. "Come now therefore, and I will send *thee* unto Pharaoh, that *thou* mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt." God will bring them up, but Moses must bring them up. Not God alone, nor Moses alone, nor yet God and Moses together, but God through Moses.

III. THE HESITATION OF MOSES AT THE GREAT SUMMONS.

It was perfectly natural and furnishes us with much food for study and encouragement. Here was a man of the very highest order of power who does not in the least attempt to conceal his wonder, his hesitation, his secret unwillingness, his want of preparation for the sudden summons. He was perfectly honest before God. And it is because he was so honest that we can understand him and get our lessons from him at this turning-point in his career. We would not lose the picture of this great man,—this chosen vessel of God,—hesitating, confessing his cowardly feelings, and trying to hide away from duty.

The response from Jehovah was as sudden as the command, and it was a complete satisfaction for all the real and imaginary troubles in the situation: "Certainly I will be with thee." Later on, the word is renewed at a critical turn in events, and it is said: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

Added to the promise was a token for faith to rest upon. It was to be a reassuring sign that when Moses had led out the people, they should worship God upon the mount where the bush was burning. To be sure, it required faith to take the first steps that would make it possible for the sign to appear; but it all came true in due season. On the mount that could be touched and that burned with fire, amid thunderings and lightnings, the law was given forth and the people sacrificed there, entering as a nation into vows from which they are not free at this day.

Aaron

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"He that is called of God, as was Aaron."—Hebrews v. 4.

In considering the history of Aaron we must have been struck with the absence of strength and point in his own character; we might almost say with the want of character altogether. So that gifted as he was in speech beyond Moses, yet no saying of wisdom is recorded of him; and though he bore so eminent a part in the most important history of the world, and the miraculous events which accompanied the establishment of the Law, yet no memorable action is mentioned of himself alone; all is in conjunction with Moses, nothing apart by himself. And even his sins seem to have been owing rather to a want of strength in his character, than from a disposition to evil; his making the golden calf was in obedience to the people; his contention against Moses appears to have been rather at the instigation of Miriam than his own; and when Moses himself failed in faith at the Rock, Aaron was combined with him in that fall; it is spoken of as the sin of both in common.

But now what is the reason of this, that God should have chosen one to act a part so eminent, who has in himself so little to arrest our interest or claim our admiration? It is no doubt in order that our attention may be turned away from the man to the office. We behold him great indeed, as the "Prophet" of Moses, as speaking from him of the things of God; we see him in "the robe of honour, and clothed with the perfection of glory"; with the golden crown of "Holiness unto the Lord" on his head, and the Urim and Thummim, with the twelve tribes shining in radiant jewels on his breast; "in his coming out of the sanctuary, as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full." But in himself and of himself we see not, either in greatness of mind, or in wisdom, or in goodness. With the censer in his hand he is all-prevailing; with the rod of God the wonder-worker; in his ministrations he is as a continual mediator; but without the insignia of his calling we know him not. And all this, that more clearly may be seen the dignity itself of the Priesthood first instituted in him.

It is then in connection with the Christian Priesthood that we consider the history and character of Aaron. And here the first thing that occurs to us is that all the power of Aaron consists in his conjunction with Moses; through Moses and Aaron are carried on all the mighty works, the ordinances, and guidings of the people throughout. Their history comes to us like their names together, "Moses and Aaron." Without Moses Aaron is as nothing in himself, excepting for the Priesthood which he bears. Considering Aaron then as representing the Christian Priesthood, we must look upon Moses in union with him as a figure of our Lawgiver Himself. Thus Aaron is made entirely subordinate to Moses and subject to Him. This appears in the first mention of Aaron when God says to Moses, "Thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth." "And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people; and he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." Of which St. Augustine says, "Perhaps herein is to be traced a great sacrament of which this bears the figure, that Moses is as mediator between God and Aaron; Aaron the mediator between Moses and the people." "It clearly indicates," he says, "the principal place to be in Moses, the ministration in Aaron." Similar words are again repeated in the Book of Exodus which seem to contain this mysterious allusion to a Divine Mediator. "And the Lord," we read, "said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet."

And this indeed marks the whole history; every thing is in conjunction with Moses, every thing in subordination to him. Moses directs, counsels, reproves Aaron. He speaks to God for him, and intercedes in his behalf; and when it is said that "the Lord was very angry with Aaron," Aaron is spared at the intercession of Moses. He speaks to God for him; and he speaks to Aaron from God continually and throughout; in Egypt before Pharaoh; in the guidance of the people through the wilderness; in the institution of the sacred ordinances and laws. Aaron addresses him with deference, though Moses was his younger brother, and calls him "My lord." When the face of Moses shone on his coming down from the Mount, it is said that Aaron as well as the rulers feared to approach him. Moses with the rod of God prevailed against Amalek

in prayer, but Aaron and Hur had the humbler ministration of sustaining his hands. Through all these things we distinctly read that the Christian Priesthood as represented by Aaron are as nothing of themselves, but in union with and submission to their great Lawgiver; that they are always to be approaching God through the One Mediator which is Christ, they are to do nothing but at His bidding, at His appointment, and in conjunction with Him; they are to receive all at His mouth, and as from His mouth to speak for Him to the people.

It is He that intercedes like Moses on the Mount till the going down of the sun, but He requires that the Christian Priesthood should in lowly co-operation unite with Him, and as it were aid in the lifting up of His hands. He is thus graciously pleased to combine them with Himself.

Thus we learn that in the Christian Priesthood we are not to look for any great wisdom, or power of intellect, or strength of mind beyond other men, of themselves, but as they are in conjunction with Christ, speak to us from Him, and as far as He is Himself with them and confirming their words. "The Priest's lips" are to "keep knowledge" "for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." It is because they speak not their own words but the words of God. "I will be with his mouth," said God, "and he shall be thy spokesman unto the people." "I will give you a mouth and wisdom," says our Lord to His disciples; "it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father Which speaketh in you." Thus all their strength is as being with Christ; speaking from Him, and with Him, as His ambassadors and stewards, His "prophets," i.e. as speaking for Him. He is the Rock on which they are built; His Cross has become their guiding staff by which they go before and guide the sheep; the rod in their hands that works wonders; but the less they are in themselves the more will His strength be seen in them. Nay, more; they of themselves are compared with infirmities, and this will appear whenever they are apart from Him.

Hence not only is the character and institution of Aaron full of warning and instruction, but so also are the most marked events in his history. When Aaron with Miriam "spoke against Moses," the exceeding meekness of Moses himself is mentioned in aggravation of their conduct; there was in him such an absence of self-seeking. "Enviest thou for my sake?" he said on another occasion to Joshua, "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets." We see in Apostles the like tendency to err against the meekness and mercies of Christ; and both occasions continue to carry on the like caution to the Christian ministry. The offence Moses had given was that he "had married the Ethiopian woman," so the stumbling-block to the first Apostolic Priesthood was in the mystery of Christ, that His mercy had espoused the Church of the Gentile.

Again, it is not without surprise and disappointment that we read of Aaron himself, when Moses was absent in the Mount with God, making the golden calf for the people, and joining them in that terrible falling away; and this too after God had wrought such great miracles by his hand. It is indeed as if he had cast to the ground the rod which God had put into his hands, and it had there become a serpent. His faith failed, and the High Priest of God had become the maker of an idol. There is an occasion which much corresponds with this recorded in the Gospels which we cannot think of without something of the like astonishment. It is when our Lord came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, and found His own Apostles whom He had left below failing in faith, so that they were unable to cast out the unclean spirit from the child; and then too it was in like manner under the pressure of the multitude, and of the Scribes questioning and confounding them. And this falling away too was so remarkable, that it drew from our Lord Himself an expression as it were of wonder and disappointment, as it had done from Moses on the former occasion: "O faithless and perverse generation," He exclaimed, "how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?"

And these two events recorded in Scripture which seems so remarkably to correspond with, and confirm each other, naturally lead on our thoughts to consider whether they may not be intended as a warning, representing to us something to occur in the Christian Church hereafter;—even in these latter days, when our Lord being with God, and absent as it were on the Mount, He shall find on His return His own ministers falling away. For in like manner of surprise or mournful prophecy, when speaking of the great power which His elect have in prayer with God, He adds, "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith upon the earth?"

The circumstance is quite amazing, that Aaron should have made a golden calf for the people to worship, yet in these latter days of which we speak, something occurs

which may have a resemblance to it in character, when "the abomination of desolation shall stand in the holy place." Of both alike we may say in the words of St. John in the Revelation, "When I saw I wondered with great admiration." And it may be that as at our Lord's first coming the Jewish Priesthood with Scribes and Pharisees, so at His second coming the Christian Priesthood shall be found wanting. For when our Lord spake in those awful terms respecting His last coming, it was St. Peter himself that asked the question whether He alluded particularly to themselves whom He left as His stewards and servants; to which our Lord spake in answer of "that faithful and wise steward" made by his Lord "ruler over His household"; but as if intimating this want of fidelity, He added, "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming, and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and be drunken; the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for Him." Now here it is implied that such evil servant will think within himself that his Lord is delaying, and yet He had just said that His return should be very speedy and sudden. In like manner we are astonished to find that when the absence of Moses in the Mount had been for so very short a time, yet it should have given rise to such unbelief and idolatry; for there likewise it is said, "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the Mount, they gathered themselves together unto Aaron, saying, As for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Yet he had only been out of their sight for forty days. And our Lord's expression of His faithless servant, that he "shall eat and drink, and be drunken," seems to imply that intoxication of the heart which Moses found on his return; that "music and dancing," when "the people," it is said, "sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." It seems as if the accounts of both these occurrences are thus given to correspond with each other to draw our thoughts to the resemblance.

But in our Lord's description of the failure of His Priesthood there is another point which we cannot pass over without notice; for the power of His Priesthood, the unction of the Holy One, or as it is expressed in the Law of Moses, "the anointing of the everlasting covenant," depends on the mutual love and union with which they are bound together. For the Priesthood of Aaron when it was ratified in the Christian Church was founded not in one as Aaron, but in twelve. The Urim and Thummim, the light and truth of God, was to be one formed of twelve, and therefore depended on their mutual union and adherence. And this power our Lord represents as broken in the last days, when love waxing cold, the servant whom He hath left as ruler of His household "shall begin to beat his fellow-servants." And thus the blessing that came upon the head of Aaron, the anointing oil by which he was consecrated, is spoken of as representing Divine love, or union among brethren. It is indeed this union of Christian fellowship which exhibits that secret anointing of the Spirit to the people, this union especially of the Priesthood; by "this shall all men know that ye are My disciples,"—that ye My Apostles partake of the true anointing,—“if ye have love one to another.” It is to this that the increase is promised, and the enduring life. "The precious ointment upon the head, that ran down into the beard, even unto Aaron's beard; and went down to the skirts of his clothing; like as the dew of Hermon"; "for there the Lord promised His blessing, and life for evermore." Thus therefore it was that while Aaron only represents one Priest separately in his relation to God, and also to the people, or the one Priesthood, yet his very anointing is spoken of by the Psalmist as indicating this brotherly concord, in which the unction and power, the goodness and joy, the sweetness and strength of that Priesthood would consist. For in this the Christian benediction is "the fellowship of the Holy Ghost," in union with which is found "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God."

In conclusion, it may be observed that there is one circumstance which strikes one in connection with the history of Aaron with respect to the Christian Priesthood, which may give rise to some awful reflections. Aaron fell into great sins, and these much aggravated by his being a Priest of God, yet for none of these is he punished. Aaron, together with his sister Miriam, rebelled and spake against Moses, "and the anger of the Lord," it is said, "was kindled against them." Miriam was immediately stricken with leprosy, but we do not read of Aaron himself being punished for that sin. And so likewise when Aaron had made the idolatrous calf, the people were heavily visited for that sin, but not Aaron himself. "The Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made." Now what are we to understand from this but that the

sin of the Priest is especially reserved for the judgment of God? it is beyond what human law can reach: indeed human laws are only able to take into account sins that are against society; they cannot punish sins against God. In a peculiar manner "to his own master he standeth or falleth."

Now all these considerations which the circumstances and the character of Aaron give rise to are, I think, especially calculated for the Laity, as leading them to sobriety of thought and expectation respecting the Clergy; that while they "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake," they do not look for too much in their personal powers and endowments, and even in their spiritual attainments; but endeavour in all things to look beyond them to Him Whose servants and representatives they are, "the One Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus"; and especially should these reflections lead them to a more than ordinary compassion for their infirmities and failings, as remembering that they have to give an account of their stewardship to their own Master, and not to His people; and therefore as having, beyond all others, a claim upon their prayers. "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?"

Aaron

BY REV. E. MONRO, M.A.

"They made a calf in Horeb," etc.—Psalm cvi. 19.

The mixture of infirmity and strength—of earnest aim and second motive among the people of God is and must ever be a matter of anxious question; and it is for that among many other things that the people of God cry out for the Great Resurrection, and look with love to His appearing. Then "the day will break and the shadows will flee away," then doubts will be satisfied, difficulties and apparent contradictions reconciled. Then we shall know even as we are known, and seeing God face to face understand all things. Till then we must have many anxious and sorrowing hours, many deep perplexities in the valley of shadows and dimness.

Among the most remarkable circumstances connected with the people of God, are the contradictions which we see in their characters. It is not only that there are hollows where we thought that the foundations and the whole building were firm and secure, nor is it only that men who go on holily for a while often fall at last, and show frequent declinations from the path of holiness. But the very grace and virtue with which one man shines, is paled by vice, directly its contradictory; and the very point which seems to be a man's strong point becomes his weak one. It is a standing paradox, that a man's strongest point is his weakest. So Job's bitter cries against his birthday and his deep wailings sound strangely when heard in unison with those expressions of devotion and resignation to God, and those many eulogies which ring through Holy Scripture, sounding the praises of the perfect man.

So the meekness of Moses is weakened by the violent anger at the rock, the indignant protest, and the assumption of a power and independence far beyond his due and claim. The forwardness of St. Peter to express his devotion to Christ and his more than once openly avowed profession of an energy and perseverance above his companions, lead us to expect at first sight a large amount of courage. But moral courage was the very virtue which he lacked, and moral cowardice was the hand which touched and affected all the springs of his character.

The stern and lofty warnings of the lonely Prophet of the wilderness would ill prepare us for the weakness which is apparent in the bitter complaints of disappointed purpose, and constant and tiring delays and wanderings. Elijah peculiarly stands forward as a man of high and lofty aims, above all small or petty feelings; while his faults at first sight seem to belong to another class of character. And the same singular contradiction belongs to Aaron. In a general view he appears before us as the first High Priest, the elaborator with Moses of the great ceremonial of the early Church. The first expression of its high and holy worship, he comes before us conspicuous with the ephod of gold, blue, and purple, scarlet and fine linen, each colour and texture symbolical of some mystery, some wonderful arrangement of the economy of Heaven. The jewels, which

expressed the names of the twelve tribes, gleamed with radiant lustre from his breast; the beryl, and the onyx, and the jasper. He advanced with the mitre of fine linen and the holy crown of pure gold, on which was written, "Holiness to the Lord"; and as he advanced, the sound of bells told the approach of the Priest of Jehovah. Yet Aaron could worship an idol, and with the mind which had been inspired to celebrate the sacred worship, and with the hand which had been aiding in its construction, he could devise and work the golden calf. And more than that, the inconsistency is singular in one whose great work was to instruct the people in the will and ways of Jehovah, by repeated services, by type and symbol, by Urim and Thummim, by offering and sacrifice, by his own life and severe discipline to an external ceremonial law; that he should induce the people to violate the first law of all in the worship of God, and should himself make the calf which led them from their homage and their integrity. When the people said to Aaron, "Up, make us a God which shall go before us, Aaron said, Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, and your sons, and your daughters, and bring them unto me; and he received them at their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool after he had made it a golden calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play." What could be more remarkable than that a man peculiarly and especially set apart for a Heavenly mission for his great work, should not only permit evil unrebuked, but himself aid in its formation and completion, and himself suggest the mode of their idolatry, when his own great work was the *instruction* in the way of God by indirect means of the very people whom he thus misled?

Nor can we easily explain away or palliate this singular case, for we are told expressly in Holy Scripture that "the people made the calf which Aaron made"; and beside this, Moses himself rebukes Aaron in direct language, "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?"

So that whatever be the attempted palliation, whether that the High Priest did not intend himself to perpetrate idolatry, or that he did it from fear or from the exercise of an economy, or that the idolatry took some such subtle form as to destroy its reality, there can be no force in the offered excuse, since God Himself and His servant Moses alike condemned the act as sinful.

But the conflicts of Aaron with Moses are very remarkable. There is a mixture of respect and jealousy in the conduct of the High Priest which excites our surprise.

The mode of the intercourse of the brothers is introduced in the following remarkable words to Moses: "Aaron cometh out to meet thee, and when he seeth thee he will be glad in his heart; and thou shalt speak to him, and put words in his mouth, and I will be with thy mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do: he shall be thy spokesman, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." Here the relation of the two is established; the demonstrative and expressive one of Aaron, and the guiding and initiative one of Moses. And Aaron went into the wilderness to meet Moses, and he met him in the mount of God, and kissed him. So the mode of their intercourse was established, and began by the exact direction of God Himself.

But despite this, we find Aaron and Miriam conspiring against the authority of Moses, and that from a manifest feeling of jealousy. "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath He not also spoken by us?"

The shadow of truth which there is in the plea, and the slight touch of reasonableness in the complaint, makes the case the more intricate, since Moses had married the woman whom they objected to. And the Prophet Micah tells us that God sent before the people, as well as Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Here then is the third contradiction in Aaron's character, with a Heaven-sent commission to respect the elevated position of Moses, he nevertheless in the most singular way opposed the authority and assailed the office of the lawgiver.

So that we have these remarkable circumstances in the character of the Priest. The violation of the integrity of his priestly office by the elevation of an idol; the desertion of his high position as an indirect teacher of the people by joining them in a sinful act.

I have shown that these contradictions are not uncommon among the people of God. But the object is to account for it. The singular circumstance is, that it is not simply the inconsistency which we are struck with, but the actual contradiction given to the

leading virtue by the contrary vice appearing in the same character; there is more than one way of accounting for this.

The presence of a leading tendency to good throws many men off their guard with respect to some virtue, and unfenced on the side of the correlative vice, they the more easily fall. Or the apparent prevailing exercise of that virtue to the eye of the observer may be the result of a peculiarly keen attention paid to the particular point in the character of the person in question; and the result of that close attention will be to overrate each failure as well as success.

But another cause with which we are more concerned in Aaron's case, is that the fact of official position and responsibility is the real cause of our high expectations and estimate of the character.

Aaron was a consecrated priest of the Most High God. In this condition the homage paid to Serapis was astounding; he was the indirect instructor of the people, so that the yielding to and aiding them in committing the sin was worse still. He was, by God's direct command, placed officially under Moses, so his rebellion and jealousy were the more singular. We estimate him by his official position, and we are startled at his inconsistency and contradictions; for in him the position and profession of official life appear as a magnificent and solemn protest in favour of the higher devotion to Almighty God and exclusive adherence to Him, while his actual life is a continual opposition to it. The jewels of the Ephod are dimmed by the mist of human infirmity and the formal accuracy of the sacerdotal garments, deranged by the restless and uncertain movements of him who wears them. The tabernacle and the wilderness present continually contradictory suggestions offered now by the first of God's high priests, and now by the weaknesses of the son of Amram.

When the mind and attention is steadily and almost exclusively directed to one great object, there is always a tendency to err on the side of neglect of duty, in respect of that very object.

I shall better express myself by illustration. If a man has it for his peculiar vocation to study character for the purpose of carrying out efficient education in youth, he will find frequently a strong suspicion growing up and gaining ground in him as to the reality of any practical use in studying character at all. He will hesitate at times as to whether there be the differences which once so forcibly struck him, and whether, if they exist, it will be worth while to build the superstructure upon them which he had intended and begun to do. He will see failure in detail, flaws in the integrity of the design, and reason to suspect the whole, which will shake his confidence in such a way as at times to make him a greater sceptic than those were from whose suspicions on the subject he once started with indignation. If a man take up a strong and decided view on history, and imagine that he will find it running through every scene and phase alike of the history of a given country, though at times he will glow with satisfaction at the success of his application, there will be moments when he will doubt more of its truth than the most sceptical opponent to his theory; and yet that theory may be a true one, and one which in after days may afford a sound foundation for his fame and reputation.

A man will devote his whole life to the pursuit of some idea which has suggested itself to his mind in the range of scientific or mathematical discovery. He will follow up the hint with pertinacity and increased energy, and yet will at times lag in that pursuit from a hesitation as to the truth of his principles, of which the merest sciolist would be ashamed.

Apply this to the case before us, and we find a solution to many difficulties. The man of holy calling is compelled constantly to be studying and bringing before his own mind the subject matter of the Kingdom of God. He studies it not only for himself, but also for those whom he is bound to guide. The very accuracy and minuteness with which he is compelled to apply the principle of religion to one case or the other suggest doubts and difficulties, compel him to see round cases, which to less keen eyes present no difficulty; and in seeing round them he is driven to discover flaws which he otherwise had never noticed. In aiding others, he is driven to see the paths of inconsistency down which they have been wandering; and in clearing away their difficulties, he is compelled to see those difficulties in an aspect in which he had not before noticed them. He continually hesitates as to the amount of force and weight which there may be in the objections raised; faith is ever melting into opinion, and dogma into suggestion. Few objects of human contemplation or study will bear such close investigation as to appear the more true and certain by deeper investigation. We live on a surface. The ripple

reflects light and brilliance, and the belt of waters below moves in a dull and sullen mass. A deeper insight disappoints. So it is that the man whose vocation is clear and definite will err in indefiniteness in that very vocation, and inconsistency will constantly run in a parallel line with the fulfilment of his daily vocation. Then too sin is often the excess of a truth. It often assumes the shape of an exaggerated duty, just as heresy often contains in itself the germ or atom of true doctrine. Sometimes the truth which is there is concealed, and lies enwrapped in the folds of the outer excess, secreted from the dimmed or blinded eye of conscience. So in Abraham's subterfuge lay the truth of Sarai's relationship, and in David's order for Uriah's death lay the truth of the necessity for the brave warrior to occupy the post of danger.

But beyond this, in another way, truth becomes sometimes the original from which a hideous copy is drawn by which man is led to substitute Satan for God as the object of worship, and to offer the same homage to the former as he was bound to do to the latter. So the worship of God is substituted for that of Serapis, and the habit of life which had been formed round a service of devotion to a true object extends its influence over a man when he bows before a false one. The recognition of Jehovah in the priestly act, and the intervening prayer and sacrifice became a stepping-stone to the permitted worship of the golden calf.

So the deserter transfers the same spirit and energy and tact with which he once obeyed a master to that master's enemy. Ahithophel played the same part with Absalom which he had with David, and David strove to transfer the fidelity with which Abner served Saul's house to his own. So the paths of sin become the old paths which we once trod towards God; and reversing the order, the temple of Christ is converted to be an idol shrine with the same facility with which in the early days of the Church the heathen sanctuary was converted into a Christian shrine.

Joshua

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"Joshua the son of Nun."—*Joshua i. 1.*

It was a fearful burden which the death of Moses laid upon the shoulders of Joshua. How could he hope to endure it? For he had not received the long and varied training which had fitted the great lawgiver to discharge so weighty an office. No knowledge of men gathered during a life's sojourning at Pharaoh's court; no deep training in Egyptian learning; no long, lonely meditative wanderings amidst the grand Sinaitic mountains had been his. He was born a slave at about that darkest time, when Moses fled into Midian. His training had been that of his brother serfs in the brick-kilns, and under the taskmasters of Egypt. How should such an one as he become, in Moses' stead, the leader of his brethren?

Yet was there no escape for him. The mantle had fallen upon his shoulder, and where he was bidden there must he go. "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them."

Though all natural misgivings made him shrink back from the charge, yet his high faith accepted it. Already, more than once, he had experienced God's power to aid him in his greatest need. First, when at the earliest battle in which Israel was engaged with the chosen warriors of victorious Amalek at Rephidim, to him had been given the command of the untried army of Israel. Again, a second time he had himself known God's power to succour, when he and Caleb alone of all who were sent out to search the land did not, on their return, discourage the hearts of their brethren. The distinctive features of all his after life and character come out with startling clearness in the grand utterance of this, his early counsel:—"The land which we passed through to search it is an exceeding good land; if the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and He will give it us, . . . only rebel not ye against the Lord, nor fear ye the people of the land, for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not." But it was to an unwilling audience that these grand words of faith were uttered, and they did but provoke the unbelieving wrath of the clamouring people. More dangerous than all their searchings of Canaan

was that undistinguishing fury of the passionate multitude. "All the congregation bade stone them with stones." But even then, when the furious uproar of the people had swelled to its highest and most threatening tide, God interfered for His faithful ones; and "the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel."

On these past deliverances in that hour of dread his spirit rested and stirred up its energies for the new venture of a life. Moreover the voice of God spake with loving warning and fatherly encouragement to those natural misgivings: "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life," etc. (Josh. i. 5-9).

All the after life of Joshua is the carrying out with a remarkable simplicity of unquestioning faith this first charge of his God. His obedience is immediate. The days of waiting are passed. There is no more sign of doubt or of misgiving. At once he assumes in all its breadth the office so committed to his hands, and as God's vicegerent "commands the officers of the people" (Josh. i. 10).

The first command was one which showed his great faith, and tested severely the obedience of the people. The river Jordan lay between the camp and the land of their promised inheritance, and it must be passed over by them at the very outset of their march. But how could this be accomplished? Even if it were possible, with difficulty and risk, to transport over it a chosen handful of warriors, how could he possibly carry over the mixed multitude—the women and the children, and the flocks and the herds? Even over the fords of Jordan, under the most favourable circumstances of the river, this would have been almost impossible; and at this season of the year, when, from the melting of the snow upon the highlands, Jordan was greatly flooded (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest), it was more than ever impossible (Josh. iii. 15). Yet, down to these threatening floods, on the hopeless errand of passing over them, all the people are ordered to march. Surely, it must have been a sore strain upon the simple faith of the young commander to issue such an order. But his faith was strong, and he commanded, and was obeyed. And then, as the first reward of such a holy confidence, the old promises on which his heart rested were made clearer and far more explicit than they had been before. "This day will I begin," the Lord his God promises, "to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Josh. iii. 7). Then followed the stupendous miracle: when the soles of the priests' feet who bare the ark of God touched the water's brim, the upper flow of the river was arrested and stood in a heap, leaving bare the river-bed. Into it the priests advanced until they reached its centre, and there they halted with the ark, which stood as a barrier to the descending waters, heaping them up as a liquid wall suddenly congealed in their fiercest sweep, leaving below a broad passage for the whole multitude to pass. From the river bed Joshua commanded one chosen man of every tribe to bear upon his shoulder a stone, to form on the bank a pillar of memorial; whilst he placed another, also of twelve stones, in the bed itself, where the priests' feet had stood on the dry land.

The river past, he stood at last with all the people in the true land of promise; and his first act on taking actual possession of the long-pledged inheritance was to renew the covenant of Israel with the God of Abraham by circumcising all who, in the license of the desert's wanderings, had grown up without passing through the appointed rite of initiation. Next they kept the passover: and then, as marking that the desert was indeed left for ever, the manna ceased, "and they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover" (Josh. v. 11). The next act was to invest Jericho, the great city of the valley of Jordan, and the key to all the passes which led up into the highlands of the land of promise. It was the greatest city of the Canaanitish race—beautiful in situation, girt on one side by a grand palm-tree forest; golden on another with the waving grain of "the barley harvest"; backed by the swelling hills which bounded it upon the west, and looking across the rich valley to the striking mountain range of Gilead. It was an emporium of the old world's wealth, and rich in wedges of gold, in shekels of silver, and in Babylonish garments. Its walls and its colossal gates could easily resist all assaults which any instruments of war then known could make upon them. It was "high and fenced up to Heaven." It was too—as all great gatherings of the world's pomp, and wealth, and luxury unpurged by the fear of God must ever be, perhaps beyond them all—mighty in wickedness—a great festering sore of heathen abomination. Against this city, Joshua, with his men of war, set themselves. But it was not to be taken by their might. For seven days the ark of God is borne in solemn procession

round it, and on the seventh, at the mysterious summons of the blast of the priestly trumpets, the mighty walls crumble and fall flat; the Israelites march in upon the city in the first spasm of amazement and terror which smote its inhabitants, and possess it thoroughly. Then at God's command, they destroy from off the face of the earth it and all that dwelt in it, except the household of Rahab.

These two marvels, both directly connected with the ark of Jehovah's presence, which had taken, as the symbol and instrument of His power, the place of the rod of Moses, were to teach Joshua from the first that he was not as other "scourges of God" have been—the wielder of natural strength against natural weaknesses—the head of a race of men of larger stature, of braver natures, with habits unenfeebled by luxury and vice—who burst in their might, like the hurricane amidst the decaying trees of the sheltered forest, upon the soft slumbers of a worn-out people. This was the master truth of all Joshua's victories. This great truth, as a talisman for his own safety, sunk into his spirit as he gaped on those heaped-up streams of Jordan and stood unshaken amidst the dust and din and terror of the falling walls of Jericho. He moved amidst these scenes of blood as an avenging angel might hover over them—a doer of the Will of the Holy One, untainted by human passion, and full, even in his most unswerving zeal for God, of a terrible gentleness. We read this character in his fatherly sympathy with the offending Achan, even whilst he condemned to be burnt with fire the great transgressor, who had brought himself and his under the ban of God. We read it in his faithful keeping of his oath to the men of Gibeon, when, because he had not asked counsel of the Lord, he had been deceived by their fraud. This it is all important, in dwelling on the history of the Book of Judges, to remember. For only in the spirit in which Joshua wrought them can we read aright his mighty deeds: and so read, they are rich in instruction which we most deeply need. We who live in these later days can see that the whole history of man hung upon the issue of those battles in the plain of Jericho and on the hills of Beth Horon. What other conflicts have ever decided so much for humanity? Joshua stood on those fields of blood the very world-hero, bearing with him all its destinies. If Israel had been subdued by the Canaanites, if the separated seed had been mingled with the heathen, if it had learned their ways, if the worship of Moab and Chemosh and Moloch and Astarte had superseded the worship of Jehovah, how had all the grand designs of redemption been frustrated in their development! The cry of Joshua after the flight at Ai would have been the despairing utterance of the race of men, "And what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" more almost in Joshua's history than anywhere besides, may the troubled soul—perplexed and harassed by the sight, on this sin-defiled earth, of wars, battles, slaughters, pestilences, earthquakes, miseries, and treasons—rest itself, though it be with the deep sob of a present broken-heartedness, in the conviction that God has a plan for this world; that in the end it does prevail; that the Baalim of heathen power must fall before Him, and that His Kingdom shall stand for ever and ever in its truth and righteousness and love.

But it was not only by these displays of God's might fighting their battles that the soul of Joshua was strengthened for his special work. This manifestation he shared with all the people who had eyes to read the dealings of Jehovah with them. But beyond others he had to bear the burden and heat of the day: he had to issue the fearful orders for extermination: he had to see them carried unflinchingly out to the utmost letter: on him pressed the whole brunt of temptation; and so to him were vouchsafed aids which others shared not. That same communication to his inmost spirit in the utter solitariness of his individual life which had been given to Abraham in his call, to Jacob in his desert wanderings, to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, was granted also to Joshua in his need. It was when he was "by Jericho"; whilst his eye was measuring those walls which fenced it up to Heaven, whilst, it may be in the slant beams of the setting sun, he gazed with admiration at the grand proportions of its royal towers as they rose high in the golden light above, of its long fringe of majestic palm trees, of its glory and its wealth; and thought with awe upon the sentence which it was his destiny to execute upon every living thing within it—then it was that "there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand." Soldier-like, the captain-general demanded of him, "Art thou for us or for our adversaries?" The challenge woke at once the voice of Majesty. "Nay," not as thou deemest am I: prepare thy soul for God's unlooked-for visitation: "As Captain of the Host of the Lord am I come": not as mingling with these earthly hosts; but as thy fellow in a higher order; as the Mighty One in Heavenly places of Whom thou art here and now on earth the type and shadow: as Him Whom all the

Angels worship, as the uncreated Angel of the Covenant, as the Captain of the Heavenly host of God have I come to thee. The soul of Joshua owned at once the presence of his God; "he fell on his face to the earth and did worship," and cried, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" And then came the answer which the minister of Moses would read so readily in all the wide extent of its mysterious significance, the "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place where thou standest is holy." That burning bush of which his great Master had so often told him in their solemn communings, must have riven before his eyes; and there was renewed unto him, with all the added awe of such a personal appearance, the earlier promise, "As I was with Moses, so also I will be with Thee." Yes, and far even beyond this; in his soul, as in the souls of the mighty ones before him to whom it had been granted thus to commune with the unapproachable Lord, there lay ever after resting on his spirit the shadow of that mighty intercourse hushing all lower sounds into an awe-stricken silence.

So strengthened from on high, he passed through those scenes of blood which were appointed for him, as the sun's ray streams untainted through polluted elements, until his mighty work of conquest was accomplished. Thus was he nerved for every battle. Under this influence he dared, when in the going down to Beth Horon the failing light seemed to threaten incompleteness to the decisive battle with the mighty Amorites, to raise his voice of high command above the eddies of the battlefield of Azekah, and in the name of the God of the armies of Heaven to bid the sun stand still upon Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. So he fought and so he conquered, until as the Eastern province had been before, so Western and Northern and Southern Canaan were all subdued by Israel and meted out by Joshua to its several tribes as the lot of God directed.

Then, his work done, the great general retired to the lot which at the express command of God the grateful people had given him, and there he built on Mount Ephraim the city of Timnath Serah. There he dwelt in peace for some eighteen years of rest. We of this generation can understand perhaps more perfectly than most, how in those last years the grey hairs of the old conqueror and national deliverer were esteemed; how, long after his victories were all accomplished, his countrymen still felt safe in the enjoyment of their days of peace from the consciousness that the great chieftain yet lived amongst them; how they hung with admiring confidence on him who in his own person set ever before them the visible token of their God's past blessings to them.

Yet the time came when Joshua too was to be gathered to his fathers. But before he passed away, one last solemn duty was yet to be discharged. He called together the heads of the people whom his arm had formed into a national life, left them his last charge, and bound them with his parting words to an everlasting covenant of faithfulness to the God Who had done such great things for them. How grand a gathering it was! There stood the victor in an hundred battles, now "old and stricken in age"; for it was already "a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies." Before him was gathered all Israel, "their elders, their heads, their judges, and their officers," and he opened that mouth from which such words of might, and trust, and prayer had issued in the days of their troubles, and he spake to them what all felt to be his last counsels and commandments.

The words were still, as the great soldier's words had always been, instinct with the brief, stern eloquence of truth and action. "Cleave unto the Lord your God." "The Lord your God is He that hath fought for you." "Be ye very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses: turn not aside therefrom to the right or to the left." "Put away the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel." "Take good heed unto yourselves that ye love the Lord your God." "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one good thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord God spake concerning you: all are come to pass." And then the voice died out upon their ears with that which woke a sob from many a rough breast, and dimmed many an eye with unbidden tears. "Behold this day I am going the way of all the earth."

Though his name is not written in the roll of the Prophets, yet on him too rested the great Divine Indwelling. The mighty warrior, the true counsellor, the just divider, the strong and patient ruler; he too had partaken largely of the sevenfold gifts; he too left upon his people the mark of a great character and of more than earthly power. It is a grand record,—as of the trumpet's tongue when, dirge-like, it subdues its louder utterance only to witness more by its suppressed power,—“After these things Joshua, the servant

of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old, and they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath Serah : and Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and of the elders that overlived Joshua."

One other aspect remains to be glanced at of this mighty general. In more various points and with a closer similarity of outline than belongs, perhaps, to any other figure in the Old Testament, is Joshua the type of Christ. His very name begins the great intimation. Changed by Moses—doubtless at the mouth of the Lord—from Oshea, "welfare," to Jehoshua, or Jesus, "God the Saviour"; it pointed him out as the figure in the earthly of the Heavenly Deliverer. Joshua moreover is pre-eminently one of the people whom he delivers; he has worked with them in the brick-kilns of Egypt, he knows their hearts; in all their afflictions he has been afflicted; and so Jesus stooped to be made in all points like unto His brethren, that, having been Himself tried with all temptations, He might know how to succour them that are tempted.

When Joshua has entered on his leadership, prophetic acts, full of typical significance, begin with a wonderful minuteness to repeat themselves. He and not the great lawgiver is to bring the people into Canaan: Moses must depart to secure his every word of promise being fulfilled to Israel, as the law must pass away and be fulfilled before the spiritual Israel could enter on their kingdom. At the river Jordan Joshua is shown by God to Israel as their appointed leader; there God began to magnify him. As Jesus comes up from the river Jordan the Heavens open, the Holy Ghost descends, and the voice of God declares, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." At Jordan's waters He too is declared to be given as a leader and a commander to the people. From Jordan's bed Joshua took twelve stones to be for evermore a witness to the people of their great deliverance; from His baptism in Jordan Jesus began to call His twelve Apostles, the foundation-stones of that Church which witnesses to every generation of the redemption of the sons of Abraham by Christ. Twelve stones Joshua buried under the returning waters of Jordan; and over the first twelve Jesus let the stream of death flow as over others; whilst they were repeated in their office of witnesses to Him by all the enduring succession of His earthly ministers with whom He is, even unto the end of the world. As soon as the chosen people, soiled by their long travel in the wilderness, enter the land of promise, Joshua renews in their circumcision the covenant of Jehovah's peace; and Jesus grants to all who pass the Jordan with Him the true circumcision of the Spirit. The Captain of the Host, as God reveals Himself to Joshua, is ever with the great earthly warrior of the people; and in the Man Christ Jesus dwells "the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The mighty walls of Jericho fall low as Joshua marches his appointed circuits around them, compassing them seven times with the ark of God's presence; and as Jesus accomplished His course the world citadel falls low; for unto the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit yields the will of man; and the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ. Joshua leads the people of God into the promised land, but they must fight for their possession; and Jesus, though He brings His own into the spiritual Canaan of His Church, has come not to bring peace, but a sword. Not one of His can sit down and dream his life away; each one has life's battle, earnest, hard, severe, to fight. As Joshua said of old to the children of Joseph, so to each one of His speaks our Captain, pointing to the hill of light and the everlasting inheritance, "Thou art a great people, and hast great power; thou shalt not have one lot only, for the mountain shall be thine." When his work was over Joshua mounted the hill of Ephraim and dwelt in his own possession, not falling to him as to others of his brethren by the lot, but as his own right yielded to him as the conqueror of all; and even so went up the Captain of our salvation to the Heaven in which He was before, His own by right, His own by conquest. For "this Man after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool" (Heb. x. 12, 13). Before Joshua departed, he called to him on that mountain of Timnath Serah which he was about to leave, all the heads of the tribes, and with the chant of a prophetic voice set before them all the grand future, which, if they clave steadfastly to God, should certainly be theirs; and so before He ascended into the Heavens did the great Captain of God's spiritual army appoint to meet upon a mountain top in Galilee the heads of all the tribes into which His Church should multiply, and there looking with them over the far out-stretched dominions of the earth, did He utter to them, Joshua like, the words of wonder which rung for ever in their ears, "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and on earth; go ye therefore and evangelize all nations."

Yea, and yet again after a higher sort than belongs to this present world was Joshua but the type of Jesus. For it is He Who for each one who follows Him, the true Captain of their Salvation, divides the cold waters of death, setting against their utmost flood even when that Jordan overfloweth his banks, as he doth all the harvest time, the ark of the body which He took of us, and in which God dwelleth evermore; so making a way for His ransomed to pass over. It is He Who hath gone before to prepare amongst the many mansions of His Father's house the place which the golden lot marks out for us; it is He Who hath trodden down all our enemies; it is He Who hath built the golden city upon the "twelve foundation-stones, which bear the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb"; it is He at Whose trumpet sound, when the seven days of the great week are accomplished, the walls of Babylon shall fall. It is He Who goeth forth conquering and to conquer, until all His enemies are put under His feet; and so the last type of this life of wonders shall be fulfilled; and the true Joshua from the exceeding high mountain of His Timnath Serah shall look around Him on the tribes of God and see them all at peace; the prayer-promise which was breathed in time fulfilled in eternity: "Father, I will that those whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which I had with Thee before the world was."

Joshua

BY REV. W. HARRIS.

"It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho," etc.—Joshua v. 13.

The question which forms our text seems to contain within itself the character of the man who asked it.

I. HIS COURAGE, BOTH PHYSICAL AND MORAL; that is, courage in its lower and higher manifestation. Many things by which we are surrounded, perhaps all natural objects, are composed of two distinct parts, that which is external, enclosing an internal substance of the same shape, possibly, but distinct from it. The nut has its kernel and its shell; the orange its rind and its pulp. One may exist apart from the other, but both are needed to form a complete whole. We are made up of soul and body, each can exist apart from the other, but they must be united to be a complete man. So it is with physical and moral courage; the first is but the shell, the second is the kernel, the former is but the body of that of which the latter is the soul. The first may, and often does, exist without the other, but a perfect man possesses both, and except in cases of defective bodily organisation, moral courage always develops physical. Many a man, alas! who would face ten thousand bodily perils, or lead a forlorn hope in the day of his country's need, would not dare to be known as a man of prayer, would not dare to stand up for the rights of his conscience in the midst of scoffing comrades. But a man who is not afraid to pray, who can bear to be laughed at because he is a Christian, will not be wanting in the hour of bodily danger. He who fears Him Who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell, will not fear that which kills the body only. I have only to refer you to Cromwell, to Washington, to Livingstone, all eminent servants of the most high God, and men of invincible animal courage, as proofs of what I have said. Now Joshua's conduct and question on this occasion prove him to have possessed this twofold courage. He was doubtless alone, probably beyond the reach of human help, and he saw one who he supposed was a man like himself, but a man with a drawn sword, of martial aspect doubtless, who might, for aught he knew, be but the leader of a host of enemies not far off; yet he goes directly up to him, and challenges him to declare at once who he is, and for what purpose he has come. We are reminded of other instances, where moral and physical courage blend themselves in the acts and words of Joshua. Recall the time, nearly forty years before, when Caleb only standing with him, he resisted the murmurings and the threatenings of the congregation of Israel, saying, "Rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us; fear them not."

II. THE QUESTION IS INDICATIVE OF DECISION, WHICH IS ALWAYS THE OUTCOME OF COURAGE.

Courageous decision is in constant requisition, and is constantly manifested in daily life. The miner needs it and manifests it, when the terrible fire-damp has imprisoned

in the bowels of the earth his unfortunate comrades; the fireman when called to rescue a fellow-creature from the flames; the seaman when the ship is sinking and not a moment can be lost. Some instances of the importance of decision arising from undaunted courage stand prominently forth in the annals of our country. Such an act laid the foundation of our Indian Empire, when an army of only three thousand strong, a third only of which was English, encountered and defeated 55,000 troops under the terrible Surajah Dowlah. "On this occasion," says Macaulay, "for the first and last time Clive's dauntless spirit, during a few hours, shrank from the fearful responsibility of making a decision. He called a council of war; the majority pronounced against fighting; and Clive declared his concurrence with the majority. But scarcely had the meeting broken up when he was himself again. He retired alone under the shade of some trees, and passed an hour there in thought. He came back, determined to put everything to the hazard, and gave orders that all should be in readiness to pass the river on the morrow." That decision made us masters of Bengal; but there is a decision springing from a far higher courage, and having results depending upon it of an infinitely more important nature. Captain Hedley Vicars entered one day the quarters of a brother officer, and, while waiting for his friend, just to pass away the time, opened the Bible and read from 1 John i. 7: "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." "If that be true," said he, "I will henceforth live as a man redeemed by the blood of Christ." He purchased a large Bible, and placed it where all who entered his room might see it, and know the colour under which he now meant to fight. He was called upon, a few years after, to make many important decisions in the service of his earthly sovereign, and gave his life as the consequence; but no act of bravery on the field equals that by which he declared himself a soldier of Christ. Joshua was an embodiment of such courageous decision, both in its higher and lower development. "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" speaks a man who has made up his mind, and just what we should expect from him, who, in his old age, gathered the tribes of Israel together and said, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve;—as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

III. THE SOURCE OF JOSHUA'S COURAGE AND DECISION, AND THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY WERE SUSTAINED.

1. He rested on the promise of God: "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee"; and with such a Leader Joshua felt he could go anywhere and do anything. If men have confidence in their captain they will always follow him anywhere. You know, when Franklin set out on his expedition to try to discover the North-West passage, how eager the seamen were to sail with him. They knew their leader, and were assured that, if the undertaking could be successfully carried through, he was the man to do it. Joshua had seen the mighty works of God during the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, and he rested on the assurance of the Captain of the Lord's Host, that He would not fail or forsake him. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee," is the great inspiration of all true courage; "The Lord of Hosts is with us," has been the battle cry that has echoed through the ages from rank to rank in the noble army of witnesses for God's truth, and the same Angel-Jehovah Who appeared to Joshua says to every man, woman, and child who looks to Him for strength, "Lo, I am with you alway."

2. Joshua's courage was sustained by constant meditation on the Divine precepts. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." Just as the bread we eat from day to day, or the life-blood that courses through our veins is not the same in identity, but ever the same in nature and in its end—the sustaining of life in the human body,—so the promises and precepts of the Word of God, various in form as the circumstances of those to whom they were first addressed, have the same effect and aim, the nourishment of the human spirit by begetting and maintaining faith in the living Father and in His Son Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, let me ask each one of you, "Art thou for us?" that is, for Christ and your own salvation? You must be on one side or the other; there is no neutral ground. "He that is not with Me is against Me." Hear some reasons why you should be on the Lord's side. You will have a Commander Who never lost a battle. When Warwick, the Kingmaker, led his troops in the battle of Barnet, in order to share with his men the dangers of the day, he fought on foot by their side. But this cost him the battle and

his life, because he could not see all over the field at once, nor could he be so readily at the various points of the field where his guidance was needed. Now this can never happen to our Captain, for He can see everywhere at the same time, and be in every place at once. You will only lose, in entering His service, what you can well do without, an accusing conscience; and gain what is more precious than all in the world besides, a sense of reconciliation to your Heavenly Father. You will be fighting for what is right, and nothing but right; the Christian warfare is pure benevolence, hurting nobody, but bringing untold blessings to yourself and others. It develops the noblest qualities of the human soul—self-denial for the good of others, perseverance in all noble work, and, little by little, you will yourself become, like your Leader, invincible, and then take your place with those who bear their palms of victory before the Throne. If you are parents, you will then be able to teach your children's hands to war, and their fingers to fight, and leave them to bless the world and to bless you when you have entered upon your reward.

God is for you if you are for Him; arise, therefore, dress for the battle: "take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

Joshua

BY REV. J. H. GURNEY, M.A.

"So Joshua smote all the country of the hills," etc.—Joshua x. 40.

"Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth," etc.—Joshua xxiii. 14.

These two passages bring before us one of the famous Old Testament saints, first, in the vigour of his manhood, and, secondly, in the last stage of a life spent in the service of God. Both scenes come under our notice in the Lessons appointed for the day, and there will be some advantage in looking at them together. We like to see how men demean themselves in widely different situations,—to mark them successively in action and in repose,—to watch how their spirit proves equal to the two extremes of fortune, and how far they are preserved by principle from temptations of rather an opposite kind. So we will take Joshua for our subject to-day, and will offer some remarks both on the deeds of the victorious General, and on the words of the dying Saint, trying to get some instruction and encouragement for ourselves from what we find recorded concerning him in both characters.

1. It is impossible, I think, to read the first of these two chapters without being struck with the picture of *active, untiring energy which it brings before us*. No time is lost; no pains are spared; there is neither rest nor pause in the war, till every opposing power is utterly destroyed. We hear, in the opening verses, of the new allies of Israel, the Gibeonites, appealing to Joshua for protection against five kings of Canaan who had combined to destroy their city. The camp of Israel was presently astir; a rapid night march brought them up to the enemy; the conflict was short, apparently, and the issue decisive. Many fell in the battle, and numbers more in the pursuit. The arrows of the Almighty,—*"great hailstones from Heaven,"*—made more havoc among the flying host than the sword of Israel, and to render the work of destruction yet more complete, the day was preternaturally lengthened,—Joshua boldly asking, and God marvellously granting, that the sun should tarry in the midst of Heaven as he had never tarried before since he began to shine. This, however, was not all. A single victory, though no enemy remained in the field, did not satisfy the leader of the armies of Israel; the land was to be cleared of idolaters before he and his countrymen could settle in it safely or comfortably; so the strongholds of Canaan must be completely overthrown. This was the charge given to Joshua, and he did his work promptly, diligently, thoroughly. Libnah and Makkedah and Lachish and Eglon and Debir were all taken and destroyed. *"He left none remaining"* is the phrase five times repeated. He gave the enemy no breathing time, and left them no rallying-point. He fought like a valiant Captain, and never rested till his task was finished; so God gave him victory and rest and honour.

Let us pursue our enemies in the same way, my brethren, not parleying with sin, not looking about for truces and compromises at every turn, but remembering that, if we be Christ's true disciples, we must be like watching or fighting soldiers all our days.

Worldly men are at ease too soon. They cry, Peace, if there be no enemy in sight. All is well in their eyes, if their earthly schemes prosper, and they have a good store of friends, and sickness or trouble does not invade their homes. If you speak of conflict, their thoughts run upon scenes of violence in which man aims at the life of his brother-man, or in which contending armies carry devastation through whole provinces. But the Christian man knows of another battle-field, his own wayward heart; and in *that*, with no witness and no helper but his God, he meets many an onset and wins many a triumph. The presence, and power, and never-slumbering activity, and unappeasable hatred to God and goodness, of Satan and his obedient hosts, are to the struggling, advancing believer, not like a part of some well-constructed fable, nor even the less important and less practical portions of the creed which he learnt in childhood; but solemn, heart-awakening, and most painful realities; and therefore, he is like a soldier on march, looking out and looking on, his weapons burnished and ready for use, and his spirits braced up for the encounter with embattled hosts against whom, if need be, he must war to the death. He has before his eyes, not the worldling's low standard, but something vastly higher and nobler. He longs, not merely to escape censure, and pass muster among the crowd, who have no lofty aims, and no fixed standard of morality, and no comprehensive principles of action, but to be conformed to the pattern of his Lord; and while he keeps his eye on *that*, he finds himself continually foiled and thrust back. His neighbours, most of them, are at peace with the world; they love and court those who rule in it, prize what it sets a high value upon, and hold cheap whatever it consents to scorn. He, on the other hand, has received the command from Christ, not to be conformed to it, but to overcome it by the power of faith,—to testify against it, that its works are evil,—to leaven it, if possible, with truth and godliness.

All this implies not only action, but a sustained struggle against adverse forces; and therefore we say that Joshua's victorious career is to be the type of ours. Therefore we remind you that, if you be like-minded with God's true servants in all ages, you must be fighting men, while you continue here. Therefore we call upon you, as in God's sight, to inquire what you are doing or purposing that will bear to be compared with those rapid marches from one stronghold to another, till no hiding-place was left, over a wide district, for the enemies of God and His people. Search and see, my brethren; for the good fight of faith must be fought, and Satan is never subtler than when he would persuade you to be at rest too soon. What have you done, let me ask, in the last month or year, to get your will subdued, your affections purified, the world put in its right place, and the whole man made obedient to the law of Christ? Some victory was gained one day, perhaps; but was it pursued? Were you so well pleased with it, that you settled down on the conquered territory, instead of pressing on beyond it? What is in hand now? When had you your last struggle, and what came of it? Was it an honest, manly encounter in which you stood up for God and truth and conscience, as a man would stand up for his treasure or his child, when assailed by enemies of flesh and blood? or was it a sort of feint, a show of resistance, such as a hired attendant might exhibit in defending his lord's property after having taken a bribe from the plunderer, and bound himself by covenant to let him carry it away unharmed? Do you take a wide range as you survey your own character, trying to discover the faults which lie out of sight, not those only which are most glaring and prominent? and, as to one and all, is it your constant desire and prayer that they may be not only kept in check, but fairly rooted out? Are you going the right way to work,—looking at yourself first in the glass of God's Word, and, when sin is detected, promising yourself that you will not spare it, confessing its guilt and shame, seeking pardon through Christ, and setting about the work of reformation instantly?—or do you take another course, tamper with conscience, take low thoughts of your duties and obligations, and speak peace to yourselves without any warrant from Him Who alone can give peace?

Questions like these are very necessary for your safety; and if they be pressed home upon a congregation like this, will they not prove to many of you, that your warfare is altogether a quieter and less determined thing than Joshua's? O for the day when the professing Church of Christ shall march on as steadily from victory to victory as that triumphant host! O that we might understand in all its length and breadth the Apostolic command to "watch" and "stand fast in the faith," and, "quit us like men!" O that we might feel ourselves disgraced by relaxing our efforts, and letting our time slip away without the record of any ground gained, any evil habits forsaken, any of our poor feeble graces matured into fuller strength,—just as a Prince among the tribes of

Israel would have felt disgraced if he had stayed behind at Jericho or Ai or Makkedah, while the enemy was still in force, and might combine their armies once again to defy or destroy the people of the Lord !

2. We must go on, and speak of the second part of our subject, *a scene from Joshua's old age*, including his dying testimony for God, and his faithful exhortations to those whom he had ruled so well.

Observe how *modestly* he refers to his own past services. "Ye have seen," he says, all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is He that hath fought for you." For himself, he adds, "Behold I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain to be an inheritance for your tribes." Here is no allusion to perils in war, and anxieties in time of peace,—no credit taken for courage at one time, or patience at another. God had fought for them, and given them every thing. For himself, he had but divided to them their inheritance by lot,—had done the Registrar's part, as it were, and distributed to each tribe its portion. We know that, in fact, he united in himself the characters of the valiant captain, and the faithful, prudent ruler. Every claim that man, in his public character, could have on his brother-man he had on every son of Israel. Yet he claims nothing from his countrymen, and speaks to them, at last, as a common man might do who had been called to some public post.

Mark that, my brethren, and remember that if there be one thing characteristic of the full-grown saint, it is *humility*. The company of the faithful have their strong points and their weak ones, like other men. They have their distinctive features, and peculiar temperaments. As they advance from stage to stage in their Christian course, one becomes eminent in *this* department of excellence, and another in *that*. Some fail in courage; some grow but slowly in spiritual knowledge; some seem to get but half-weaned from the world before they are taken out of it. But whatever varieties there may be of another kind, the best men, when their characters are matured, and their manhood fully reached, are ever the meekest and the lowliest. They who have done most for God think the least of all they do, like the chief of the Apostles who declared himself "not worthy to be called an Apostle." So, too, they who have won many souls to Christ, in later days, marvel, when their work is done, that God ever let them labour in so good a cause, and blessed their poor words to some fainting, hungering souls. Martyrs go singing to the stake, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name be the praise." Hoary-headed disciples have their heads bowed down with shame for sins and short-comings which the young beginner would not find out. You shall hear of men who have been, like Joshua, heroes and conquerors in Christ's army,—who began by giving their hearts to God, and have helped to subdue the world to Him afterwards; and their fame shall make you long to know them; and after many unsatisfied wishes you shall be admitted to their company, and shall hear them speak familiarly of events in which they have borne a part,—of triumphs, perhaps, for which the world shall bless their names for ages to come,—and all shall be said so simply, with so little thought of attracting attention or winning praise, that you will wonder to see greatness so unpretending, and will call to mind, by way of contrast, the strange spectacle you have sometimes seen when little men have paraded their own little doings, or marvelled that the world should pass them by, and give its praises to others. "Before honour is humility," said the Wise Man, and he never spoke more truly. Let the prize we covet be, not the notice of the few, or the applause of the many, but "the honour which cometh of God." Let us hate all self-exalting thoughts as His enemies, and the troublers of our own peace. If we are permitted to do any good thing in our generation, let our Lord have the praise, Who gave us the will and the opportunity to do it. Old or young,—at the beginning of our course, and at the end of it, and all through it,—whether the talents committed to us have been few or many,—let our cry be,—"Lord, be merciful to our unrighteousness, and reckon not with us for our ten thousand short-comings. If we be indeed Thy servants, what honour dost Thou put upon us! and unprofitable servants, at the best, we are, and have been, and must be."

Along with Joshua's humble thoughts of himself, observe *his faithful, plain-spoken admonitions to his brethren*.

"Be strong and very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left." Courage is wanted, remember, to do right in the world that is full of disloyalty and sin. *Christian courage* beyond every other, is that which will keep us from turning

aside in any direction, and make us deaf with both ears to the enticing voice of friendship, or the loudest threats of persecuting power. Without courage, no man will keep a straight course for a long time together. Of this the saints have had hard and painful experience. They have found, every one of them in turn, that compliances bring along with them a whole train of perplexities. They will confess, when they have almost "finished their course," and have long "kept the faith," that, in their early days, they often played the coward, and never without encountering more of trouble afterwards than they tried to escape, when they timidly made some sacrifice of conscience. And their charge to younger brethren, in their best days, is to do valiantly for the Lord, their God,—to hold the world, and all its bribes and flatteries, cheap,—to keep close to the line of duty, come what may,—and to let all men know, soon and unequivocally, on whose side they stand, and by what principles they mean to abide.

Now it is the well-tried saint, remember, who will be listened to with respect, when he shall thus call others to be good soldiers of Christ Jesus. Just as the man who has lived through many a well-fought field, can encourage the raw recruit, and speak with authority while he refers to what he has seen and felt when swords were clashing, and comrades falling by his side,—so will the veteran in Christ's army put strength into many a fainting heart. "Fight on," he will say, "and the blustering opposer will soon come to a stand. Take counsel with God, and not with God's open enemies, or lukewarm friends, and you will find your sight and your path both cleared together. Choose what conscience tells you is the upright course, the way of God's commandments,—where holy men have walked and prayed and toiled before you,—and you will find yourself more equal to meet giant enemies in front before long than you would be to meet common men in any crooked bye-path to-day. Let the Spirit of truth guide you, and the Spirit of power will strengthen you in the inner man, till you shall wonder at your own fears, and say, respecting any duty to which God shall call you, not, *How hard it is?* or, *Who will help me?* or, *How cheaply may I hope to get it done?* but simply this, 'Lord, here am I; send me where Thou wilt; only let Thy presence go with me, and let Thy favour be my crown after the work is done!'"

Dear friends, it is a blessed thing to hear counsels like these; but it is better still to give them. May we learn from Joshua to exhort our neighbours wisely for their good, and learn for ourselves the blessed freedom of being courageous on the Lord's side! Men are bolder, alas! in this poor, disordered world, for evil than for good,—bold in their profaneness and impiety,—bold in their mortal conflicts with each other,—bold in meeting death unprepared, and going to the judgment-seat without any answer made ready wherewith to meet the accuser there; but O! how easily frightened when duty is concerned! how soon turned aside by the tone, or the look of scorn! how prone to let the faint whisper of a fellow-worm close at hand drown the thunder of God's threatenings in the distance! Let us take the wiser and the nobler course. Be you decided Christians, and encourage others to be decided Christians too. Do not be for ever trying how far you can go along with the world, or how near you can bring the world to you; but go right on, with the word of Christ for your rule, and the Spirit of Christ for your guide. You have no choice, while the world continues as it is. You must live above it, or be condemned with it. If you walk with it for a season, the parting-time will soon come. Whatever other mistakes, then, friends or enemies shall make concerning you, let none doubt whose you are, and whom you serve. Try, rather, to make your testimony so plain and unequivocal that it shall be to the world at large as if Joshua's noble declaration were inscribed on your doorposts, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua's dying testimony to God's faithfulness is the last thing we have to notice. Like all the saints of all times, he rejoices to declare, that "not one thing hath failed" of all that God promised; all has been fulfilled to the minutest particular.

God is no hard master to lay too heavy a burden on any of His servants; still less is He one to flatter and betray by making large offers, and then bestowing but scanty gifts. His children may sometimes expect too much; they may wonder how it is that He loves them, and yet does not make their path smoother, and their burdens lighter; but the fault is theirs, not His; for He never told them that this world was a garden of delights even for the faithful; only that *in* the wilderness He would give them many comforts, and *through* it He would guide them, like Joshua and Caleb and the younger Israelites, to the land of rest. The pillar of cloud, and the pillar of fire, go not before us; we do not pitch our tents, and strike them, under the immediate bidding of Heaven;

no manna is rained down upon us, morning by morning, so that we see it like hoar frost upon the ground, and may gather in our day's store without exertion or forethought. *Our* supplies are of another kind. By His word He teaches us; by His Spirit He guides us; through His Son, if our prayers be fervent and sincere, the utterance of faith and love, He promises not pardon only, but favour, rich and free and lasting, with spiritual gifts surpassing our desires, and meeting all our wants. He denies us what we ask for in our folly. He makes us wait many a time for the blessing which is doubly precious when He has trained us for its use. He leads us often by a way that we know not, and teaches us by His own methods, to "cease from man," and to trust only in Him. But of the "good things," which He has spoken concerning His people, not one has failed, or shall fail, or can fail, through eternity.

You never heard, any one of you, of the dying saint, who complained that he had built too confidently on God's Word, or warned his friends to be more wary than he had been before they began to serve Christ. Ten thousand witnesses to the world's hollowness and falseness have said, "Be wise in time; waste not your lives as we have done; seek God in your healthy times, and then you will not find your props and comforts all gone when you want them most"; but believers have another tale, in words few and solemn, while the eye glistens with feeling, and the heart overflows with tenderness, men listen as to a prophet's message, and treasure it up as a precious record for all time to come. "God is true," they say, "though all men should prove liars. He has kept me thus far, and will keep me, I know, through the struggle that is close at hand. I trusted my soul long ago to the good Shepherd's care, and marvellously has He kept me through dangers of many kinds. He kept alive my faith when it was like the bruised reed or the smoking flax. He bore with me when my love was cold, and hath made it warmer as I tasted more largely of His grace. He promised that 'sin' should not 'have dominion' over me, and in the faith of that promise I have fought against my worst enemies till they gave way before me. The last enemy is near me now; but my Lord has conquered death, and my life, my higher life, is 'hidden with Him in God.' It were wickedness and folly and base ingratitude to distrust Him now, when He has upheld me thus far, and blessed me at every step. One more step remains, and then the promise shall be fulfilled which even now transports my soul with joy; I shall behold my Saviour, and be near Him, and like Him, for ever."

My dear brethren, may we glorify God and encourage our brethren by a dying testimony such as this! May our lives be useful like Joshua's, and our end be peaceful and glorious like his! May we, like him and his faithful brother, "follow the Lord fully!" Then a better possession shall be ours in a yet more fruitful Canaan. The Captain of our salvation will divide the inheritance to us which is His by right of purchase and conquest, even the "incorruptible inheritance" which "eye hath not seen, nor the heart of man conceived, but which God has prepared for them that love Him."

Caleb

BY REV. FREDERICK FIELD, LL.D.

"My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him," etc.—Numbers xiv. 24.

We cannot but be struck with the character repeatedly assigned, in the same form of words, to Caleb the son of Jephunneh. His merit is declared to be, as in the text, that he "followed the Lord fully," or, as in the Book of Joshua, "he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." And so in other places. In fact, whenever the name of Caleb is introduced, it is almost invariably followed by this testimony, that he "wholly followed the Lord," just as, in another portion of Jewish history, the name of Jeroboam the son of Nebat is never mentioned without the sinister addition, that "he made Israel to sin." The constant repetition of such phrases is intended, no doubt, as it is well adapted, to make a forcible impression upon the mind of the hearer; in the case of bad examples, to excite a feeling of disgust and abhorrence against the conduct which is so stigmatised; or when, as in the case of Caleb, the character is highly laudable and meritorious, to hold it up to the imitation of all who are capable of imitating it. And that, in the present instance, is *all who hear or read of it*. Let us therefore enquire, generally, what it is to *follow the Lord fully*, whether as Caleb did, or as any humble and plain Christian,

who endeavours to "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless," may do.

1. First, then, and as the foundation of all, we must look to the inward mind and disposition of the person who aims at this character. "Man," we know, "judgeth according to the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Of this very Caleb it is said, that he "had another *spirit* with him," a different temper of mind from the rest of his companions, and therefore he was enabled to "follow the Lord fully," while their behaviour was as vacillating and unsteady as their disposition. It is only when the "heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord," that the choice is decided, and the conduct consistent. "A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways." The reason why so many persons continue, all their life long, halting and shifting between two opinions, is because they have never heartily embraced the right one; never "sought the Lord with their whole desire," or followed Him with their whole heart. Wayward and divided affections invariably lead to capricious and hesitating conduct. Hence the first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," which may be said to be the fulfilling of the first table of the Law, as an equally sincere and entire love of our neighbour is a guarantee for the complete performance of the second. Whoever loves God heartily will follow him fully. Caleb, no doubt, had thus given his heart to the Lord God of Israel; had taken Him for his God; had put his whole trust in Him; had believed His promises, and never doubted for a moment that he himself should live to see the accomplishment of them. In this spirit, or state of mind, he went up to spy the land of Canaan, that land of which the Lord had said to His people, "I will give it you"; and which Caleb, therefore, considered to be already theirs, though as yet, like Abraham, neither he nor they had so much as to set their foot on. Like his companions, he saw the ripe clusters of Eshcol, and recognized the "land flowing with milk and honey," which had been promised to their forefathers. But, unlike them, he saw the "cities walled and very great," the "men of the land" of gigantic stature, the sons of Anak, in whose sight he and his countrymen "were as grasshoppers";—he saw all this, which "made the heart of his brethren melt," and was not discouraged. He said within himself, as he afterwards encouraged the people, "They are bread for us." "Their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us." A firm persuasion of God's providence, an intimate conviction of His truth, and an unwavering reliance on His goodness, are the groundwork of a character which is equally "acceptable to God, and approved of men," the character of those who "wholly follow the Lord their God."

2. A person who is thus "rooted and grounded in love," will be prepared to fulfil the second requirement contained in this character; namely, that of *uniform and unreserved obedience*. To follow God is to *obey* Him. The patriarch followed God, when being "called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, he obeyed, and went out not knowing whither he went." He followed Him *fully*, when, being still more severely tried, he "offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only-begotten son, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Joshua and Caleb followed God, when they brought back a good report of the land which they had searched, and at the risk of being stoned, encouraged the people, saying, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it": whereas the men that went up with them, although they knew that this was the land which God had given them, and these were the nations which He had promised to drive out before them, "made the heart of the people melt, saying, We be not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And to take only one more example: God Himself says of David His servant, "He kept My commandments, and he followed Me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in Mine eyes." Hence we see that to follow Him *fully* is to "esteem all His precepts concerning all things to be right," and to obey them accordingly. The principle of *universal obedience* is the only one which will satisfy the requirements of such a character as is here given to the son of Jephunneh. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law," says St. James, "and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." This is undeniable; and, no doubt, every transgressor of the law, whether in thought, word, or deed, has, so far, departed from the Lord, and ceased, for the time, to "follow Him fully." Yet David, we know, to whom, as well as to Caleb, this character is assigned, was a transgressor of the law, and that in regard not to one or other of the two commandments here specified, but to both together. Therefore we said, that it is the

principle of universal obedience, and not the actual carrying out of that principle in every single instance, by which we must stand or fall. We must hold fast by the principle, however often we may fail in the application. We must hold the faster by the principle, the oftener we fail in the application. "In many things we offend all," and may do so without immediately forfeiting all claim to this character. But as soon as ever we allow ourselves in anything that is evil, or cease to strive after everything that is good, that moment we become, not merely transgressors of the law, but violators of the principle on which the law is founded. We fall into the condemnation of those who follow their own ways, and do that which is right in their own eyes. We have no longer any pretensions to be ranked with those who are "wholly following the Lord their God." After all, that was a noble testimony which is borne to David, "He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.*" But if David had proposed to himself, or if any one of us were now to propose to himself, to aim at this very mark, namely, to do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord, and to turn aside from any of His commandments all the days of our life, *save only in one particular matter, in which we reserve to ourselves the liberty of doing that which we know to be wrong;* instead of obtaining such a testimony as this, we shall be numbered with wilful and presumptuous transgressors; instead of "wholly following the Lord our God," we may more truly be said to be wholly forsaking and renouncing Him.

3. But, as Christians, we must not forget that our religion is one of *faith* as well as of *duty*. In fact, the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel are so mixed up together, and so dependent the one upon the other, that they must be accepted as a whole, as a system, or not at all. To "believe all the articles of the Christian faith," is as incumbent upon those who would follow the Lord fully, as to "keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of their life." Caleb, no doubt, believed all that had then been declared to men of "the grace of God which bringeth salvation": believed, and acted on his belief. But he was one of those "many prophets and righteous men," who "desired to see those things which we see, and did not see them; and to hear those things which we hear, and did not hear them." He followed the Lord in the sense of an *unreserved acceptance of God's way of salvation*, as far as that way had then been revealed. "Being ignorant of," or very imperfectly acquainted with, "God's righteousness," he did not "go about to establish his own righteousness." So far as we are able to judge of the character of his mind, we observe no trace of that self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, which made his countrymen, in later times, "reject the counsel of God against themselves," as their forefathers had done in the wilderness. No: Caleb "had another spirit with him"; a spirit of lowliness, meekness, and faith; such a spirit as would have brought him to the feet of Him Who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That is precisely *where we are*; and if we would keep our place, if we would "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," we must esteem all His doctrines, as well as His precepts, concerning all things to be right. There must be no "hard sayings," no unpalatable truths, between Him and us. It must be this Teacher or none; this Teacher and all that He teaches, or no doctrine, no truth at all. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Christian truth is one and entire; and must be so taught and received. To "follow the Lord fully" is to *accept the covenant of grace in its simplicity*: to know, and to desire to know, no other terms of salvation than those of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." "Other foundation" of a sinner's acceptance with God "can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And woe unto him who builds upon this foundation any superstructure but that of "repentance from dead works," and "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." It is "a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." But it is also "a faithful saying," and to be "affirmed as constantly," and received as cordially as the former, by all who would "wholly follow the Lord" Who bought them, that "they which have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works"; "holding fast the faithful word, as they have been taught"; and "being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

4. Once more, to "follow the Lord fully" is to *follow Him to the end*, to be "faithful unto death." This did Caleb. We do not now speak from conjecture, but from our knowledge of the remaining portion of his history, as contained in that interesting pass-

age of the Book of Joshua, which we have already recited. After the testimony which is borne to him in the text, Caleb continued to follow God, to believe and to obey Him, for forty and five years, that is, till he was fourscore and five years old; and for so much longer as it pleased God to spare him, to enjoy the inheritance of which he then came into the possession. *Perseverance unto the end* must always be considered as the test of true religion; of that entire devotion to the service of God which is understood by "following the Lord fully." When we speak of *final perseverance*, we are not alluding to any supposed privilege of the saints, commonly called by that name; as if those who have once been truly converted to God, and brought into a state of grace, could never finally fall away from it. On the contrary, we believe that so long as we are in the flesh, we must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling"; and "look to ourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought; but that we receive a full reward." But we speak of persevering in religion, as we do of persevering in any other good work, which is begun with ardour, but which, in its progress, meets with difficulties and discouragements such as mere warmth of temper will never enable us to surmount. We speak of that perseverance of the saints, which is pointed at in such texts as these: "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." To follow the Lord fully, we must pass through all the stages of the spiritual life; we must be subject to all the trials of the Christian course. "Through much tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of God." We must never "count ourselves to have apprehended"; but "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," we must "press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And whatever we may have attained to, whatever we may have gone through, hitherto, there is still one trial remaining, before we can be said to have "wholly followed" Him, Who "through the grave and gate of death passed to His joyful resurrection." Through that same narrow portal must we pass to ours. We must lay our heads on our last pillow, and "gather up our feet into the bed," and close our eyes upon the world and all that is in the world, either to open them on the glories of Heaven, or to "lift them up in hell, being in torments." We shall need "another spirit," a very different state of mind from our present one; larger supplies of grace, higher degrees of faith, hope, and love, to carry us through this trial. May these not be wanting! "As our days, so may our strength be!" Caleb's bodily powers were preserved to him in a remarkable manner. When he was fourscore and five years old, he was as strong as he had been forty and five years before. We ask and we desire nothing of the kind. Instead of boasting with Caleb, "as my strength was then, so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in," we would rather have to say with another aged servant of God, "I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil, or taste what I eat or drink?" But we do ask and earnestly desire, as we grow in years, that we may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." We do ask, as "our outward man perisheth," that "the inward man may be renewed day by day." We do ask, and, like Caleb, claim as our rightful inheritance, that the thing which the Lord hath spoken by His holy Prophet concerning those who have "followed Him fully" all the days of their life, may be performed in us. And what is that? "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Caleb

BY REV. GEORGE SHEPARD.

"My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him," etc.—Numbers xiv. 24.

In the fourteenth chapter of Joshua, we find a record of the accomplishment of this declaration or promise, as follows: "Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel."

We have here presented, briefly but clearly, the religious character of Caleb. The service by which his character was tested, and in the performance of which he won this

marked distinction and approval, was his thorough search and true report of the condition and resources of the land of Canaan. The individuals sent on this search, twelve in number, all agreed in reporting that the land was a land of great beauty and fertility; but ten of them went on to discourage the Israelites from attempting to take possession of it as God had directed them to do, because the inhabitants were numerous and strong, and their cities impregably fortified. Upon hearing this, the people murmured on account of the danger that awaited them. Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes, protested against the pusillanimous report the craven ten had made, and contended that the country might be easily subdued in the name of Jehovah. God was displeased with the murmuring and rebellious multitude, and passed upon them, with the solemnity of an oath, the sentence of universal excision in the wilderness; then added, But as for My servant Caleb, who has faithfully followed Me, him will I bring into the land, and he shall possess it, he and his children. We see that the description of this ancient disciple is slightly varied in the different places. In one, it reads, He hath followed Me faithfully; in another, He hath followed Me wholly; and again, He hath followed Me fully: all the descriptions, however, bear the same meaning, and that meaning very obvious. The main idea is that of the wholeness, entireness, totality.

Following God wholly: it means with the whole heart. Great account is made of this in Scripture,—the heart-service, service with all the heart. This God everywhere insists on,—unvarying, unfaltering singleness of purpose and affection. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," is not only the first, the beginning, of the commandments; it lies at the foundation of every thing that comes after. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon, is not only a declaration of Scripture, but an axiom of our common sense.

Following Him fully: it extends to all the faculties we possess, takes in all the talents, all the powers, God has given us. Inasmuch as they came from Him, their strength and influence should revert back to Him; all made to terminate on His Kingdom and glory.

Following Him fully: it extends to and embraces all the requisitions of God's Word, the entire circle and detail of Christian duty. In the character described, there is no disposition to make exceptions; to pray to be excused in regard to certain matters; to think a great deal better of the Bible, if its strictness could only be abated, somehow explained away. The one following fully does, indeed, come short,—and none so keenly sensible of it as he; yet never is it matter of calculation with him; never the springing up of the desire to be relieved from a portion of that enjoined upon him. His aim is to be thorough, conscientious in little things, in all things, and to love duty in all the wholesome severities of it.

The following fully, extends to, takes in, all times and all circumstances. It is a following God when scorn points her finger, and obloquy hurls its reproaches, and persecution builds her dungeons and kindles her fires; professing Him, adhering to Him; come what may, neither fearing nor faltering. And what is more difficult, and more decisive of the following fully, is the adhering to God, faithful to the spirit and duties of religion in times of prevailing indifference, coldness. This, indeed, was the very test-point in the case of Caleb and Joshua. Ten of their companions broke away from their allegiance to the truth and to God; and the whole body of the people followed these recreant ten. But these two stood firm, stood alone; resisted the overwhelming torrent of iniquity; maintained their integrity, and persevered, and blenched not. Thus it was they won the encomium of following fully. This is very plain; namely, that it is one thing to follow the Lord at such a time, quite another thing to follow Him when all things favour; when the current sets that way, so that it is popular to put on the seeming of religion; religion being the talk in the house and the shop and in the very mart of business. Many will fall in at such a time, who have no good foundation, no abiding principle planted in the heart; and who will fall off in the time of spiritual drouth and dearth. When the popular interest is in another direction; when some gilded bauble, some scheme of gain, some flaunting amusement, is the grand attraction,—then where are the Christians? Then is the time to find them out, to count and set down the reliable ones.

Circumstances of a more limited character furnish the opportunity of reaching this rare distinction of following fully. The havoc of circumstances, how sad, how terrible, as witnessed on every hand. Some, in changing their business, will exchange away the spirit and hope of their religion. Some, in leaving their old place of abode, will put off, or wear very loosely, in their new residence, the garb of piety. Some, by entering into new domestic alliances, or connections more unfavourable to religion than surrounded

them before, will compromise, and gradually give up, their Christian profession. There are others who will not, but will take their religion, a humble, faithful piety, wherever they go themselves; at least, silent reprovers in the presence of all wickedness, shedding some Heavenly light, though in the thickest darkness of error; imparting some savour of Christ under the very seat and throne of Satan himself. Such come into the rank of followers fully, disciples, Christians altogether, at all times and in all circumstances. And the reason they are such is, that they have another spirit with them, as Caleb; another spirit, one altogether different from the spirit found in worldly men, in the great majority of men; a spirit, a principle, a consecration, which is the work and the fruit of the Spirit of God; not nature, but grace; a gracious renewal, the heart's deep change, the love of God implanted as supreme. Out of this springs true soul-courage. The soul, loving, fearing, the Infinite One, is thereby ready for any emergency. The scorn, the threats, of hostile millions are as nothing when against the will or the honour of God. This is what sustained that ancient disciple when he stood so sublimely alone; so firmly stood when all others quailed and fell. The people were ready to stone him, but the glory of the Lord flamed between to prevent them. This same spirit, the love of God made regent, the fear of God casting out all other fear, is indispensable as a prerequisite in carrying through our religion in a corrupt, time-serving age, when interest is stronger than conscience, and when the honour derived from one another is more highly prized than the honour which cometh from God only.

It is obvious to remark, in view of this subject,—

1. That being a whole Christian is an exceedingly great advance upon being half a one. Indeed, the case is such, that no addition or multiplication of the half will make the whole. One of the latter sort in moral prowess and strength, will chase a thousand of the former, and two put ten thousand to flight. By no rule of arithmetic or law of morals are the two sorts in any way comparable.

2. It is further obvious, that what is wanted in our time is not so much more Christians as more Christianity; not more in number, but more in quantity. I have thought, sometimes, that we might say of religion as is said of learning,—that a little religion is a dangerous thing; dangerous in its bearing upon others. I mean the half-and-half sort, the attempted mixture of the good and bad, the strong patch on the old and rending garment; a medley of inconsistencies, a bundle of contradictions, a problem dark with enigmas. The men who live thus are good men some of them, we fain would believe, back in the secret place of the soul, and will get to Heaven, we earnestly hope; but there are so many foibles and detractions and downright failures to be and do, and so many harmful things emanating from them as they pass along toward their final rest, so little that is the Christian, so much not the Christian, that it seems a decided misfortune to the world that they are so long getting through and getting home. Oh for Christians of the other pattern. Oh that God would bring us all to be such, by discipline, by suffering, by persecution, by any thing.

Caleb

BY REV. A. G. MERCER, D.D.

"My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him," etc.—Numbers xiv. 24.

I take Caleb to have been, first of all, a thoughtful person, a considering man, capable of being taught, which cannot be said of many. He had seen no more of God than had all the others, but what he saw, he saw, and after he had come through the Red Sea, and looked at the hand of the invisible One in the wilderness, he felt that that was enough for a wise man; and so he did not go about afterward, as the others did, to frame doubts or to call every new case different, and say: "True, He saved us there, but can He save us here? He gave us water, but can He give us bread also?"

He had no brutal capacity for forgetting, either. When the illustrious moments of God were past, their shining kept with him. He was not so swallowed up in to-day as to forget yesterday, and to say, "Where?" He forgot not how God "had wrought His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan." He remembered; and that, observing human nature, then and now, is much. He remembered. If nothing else could be said of him, this would be enough. Ah! if it could be said of us! On

the paths behind us, all along them, are scattered the tokens of a God as wonderful as the God of the Red Sea or the God of the desert; but, like these Hebrews, we must hear the sharp crack of His thunder again to-day, or we will not so much as know that there is a God.

So bestial is this oblivion of our past, so fatal are its consequences, that had I the power at this moment to call forth a new and mighty prophet for the instruction of mankind, I would require that he be a prophet of the past, rather than a prophet of the future. I mean that I would rather that he should show me clearly all that has happened to me, that he should set my past in a light clear and sacred and lasting, than that he should illuminate for me all the unknown yet to come. If I were to ask any one gift for us, it would be an illuminated memory of our own private history, and of that God Who has everywhere shown Himself in it, filling it with the wonders of His justice and mercy,—with warning and hope.

See next the independence of Caleb. The act altogether nearest the Godlike is that of a man who, in the face of opinion and of public shame, and against a fiery current of everybody's feelings, even of those who are near to being a part of himself, stands fixed in his judgment of what is right, uncorrupted, and unshaken,—a liegeman of Duty! So stood Caleb; and his attitude is to me the noblest I can imagine.

I know it is false and blasphemous, the maxim that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," yet the mere power of universal opinion, universal feeling, is such that no one can exaggerate it, and few withstand it. Let all voices be heard in one intense cry, and you will see not only the feelings but the consciences of men swept away as by the outlet of an ocean. Nay, the outcry of the people is felt, for the time, to carry God with it, and to be His veritable voice. He who resists it must be something above or below man. And no fine soul can resist it, unless he is under a higher sympathy,—a sympathy with a better public opinion and with the nobler society of God and the just. A sympathy with God and with duty, with the welfare of the people,—that, and that only, lifted Caleb up clean out of sympathy with the whole degraded nation.

See again, not only his independence toward his own people, but his courage. Never was there greater occasion for apprehension. If the Israelite looked to his own camp, he saw it hampered with wives and children,—an unwarlike mass moving out of the wilderness,—not even moving onward under savage enthusiasms (which enthusiasms again and again in history have made the descent of wild hordes like the sweep of a wing of fire),—I say, not moving thus, but creeping on at best under a cold thought of duty, or under a cold fear of Moses and the unseen Lord. What could be done with such men, whose choice princes and leaders came trembling back at the sight of the enemy? What could be done with this feeble mob, when before them stood swarms of formidable warlike tribes? At this awful moment Caleb stood forth. "The cities *are* great and walled, the people be strong,—yes; and there are giants there; but let us go up at once and possess it, for we are able to overcome."

If you speak of courage, look at this. The records of man have nothing greater. "We are nothing"; all the people, all the leaders say; "we be not able," etc. "We are of a gigantic brood, higher and mightier than they all," say Caleb and Joshua. All courage, if it is not merely animal, rests on something higher,—rests often on duty and devotion to others.

I think an example of this is seen in Arthur, Duke of Wellington. He was unawed, at the great crisis of Waterloo especially, because of duty. When all Europe, and military men particularly, were under a fascination as of magic from the genius and success of Napoleon, who towered over them like a phantom, the Duke had little or no imaginative fear on the subject. He looked coolly and soberly at the object as it was, and calmly confided in his forces and plans, resting on duty and right. And so this was the man whom God appointed to win; hence Waterloo. He first kept his soul unjugated, and the unprecedented and irresistible genius against him did not master or overawe his imagination.

But the courage of Caleb was far higher than this; it was against far greater odds, and it was founded not merely on devotion to duty, but on perfect assurance in God. We call this courage, and it was; but it rested on something deeper and far more rare, —on *trust*.

The heroic virtues of those old Hebrews were not the heroic virtues of Plutarch; they were all that, but much more. Though the obstacles were bristling before him as high as Heaven, the Lord on high was mightier. To go forward was to move in the invincible

line of right. In that line he saw that God moved with them, and that those who were for them were mightier than those who were against them. And so Caleb touched and rested on powers the eye could not see. He had within him the great Hebrew secret of faith; and when he said, "Let us go up, for we are able," he knew he took God with him.

This is the common principle of the Old and the New Testament, and makes the opposite virtues of a rude and warlike society essentially the same as the peaceful virtues of Christianity to-day. The quiet trust in God of a weak woman in her hard daily life, surrounded by fears, is essentially the same as that which gave courage to Caleb. We see Jesus, born of the same tribe as Caleb,—we see Him no warrior, One Who said, "Put up thy sword," etc., yet Caleb's independence of men, his courage before force, was but a weak and limited shadow of the heroism of Christ, even in His meekest and gentlest action.

See then in Caleb just the virtues demanded of us to-day. To us—to each man of us—who have always a crowd of discouragements holding us back, creeping on with but half a heart, to us this exhilarating voice comes like a trumpet sounding from that distant time: "Let us go up, for we are able."

We need the joy, the hope, of courage; and that we may have courage, we need an unbounded trust in God.

In this story of the old time,—this historical picture, seen far back and illumined with miraculous lights,—there is nothing old or strange to me: ourselves are there, in bare fact, as we are every day. We see that the land is good,—but ah, the giants! Does the picture of that old congregation, as it "lifted up its voice and wept that night,"—does this surpass our fears, our weakness before duty? Was their trust in the graciousness of God any more feeble and wretched than ours is? I think not.

We lead our lives coldly and poorly. We need trust, and to add to our trust courage. Discouragement ruins us. There is no power of grasp in the hand, and we cannot lay hold on eternal life. And so we live out our poor nerveless days.

Yea, we,—even now,—we who have a Gospel which pledges salvation to us,—we who have the mercy of God and the might of the Spirit of God assured to us by the blood of the Son of God,—we who have a land of eternal promise opened to us, cannot enter, because we have no trust: the thing is too great for us to do! Why, if there is any thing true it is this,—that man is set forth as were these Israelites, to win a good,—not to stroll up to it by chance, but to win it. We are appointed to reach a wide and rich and peaceable land through enemies. For this, I have said, we need a will which grasps success, and fastens upon it, and will never let it go; and there is no such courage without a fulness of trust in the heart. But this is not all our need. Listen: "But My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed Me fully, him will I bring into the land."

That is God's description of the man who wins. "Another spirit,"—a spirit the precise opposite of that of the Hebrew mob,—and "because he hath followed Me fully." Wholeness,—the heart whole. There were good men in the camp; but some part of their hearts went back to Egypt, or to comfort and ease; and they believed in God,—but not in the face of giants. In all that mass there were but two or three persons who followed God "fully." All the rest had two hearts. God and the world, they worshipped both together. So you see God does not praise Caleb's courage and faith, though He might well have done so. One thing fixed the Divine attention and applause: "He hath followed Me fully." "And him will I bring into the land."

The land,—the better land on high,—it is for him, and for all such. I sometimes ask myself: Must all this weak race perish except the handful who have a divine energy in their souls? Ah! Lord God, some of us would follow Thee fully,—but our weakness! Breathe Thou light and strength within us, touch us with a better trust, let us see and live in Thy presence, and feel Thy power, and remember Thy gracious promise. And oh, when we have finished our course here "as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," may we rest in hope, and our record be: "This My servant, because he hath followed Me fully, him will I bring into the land."

Balaam

BY REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, M.A.

"Balaam said unto the Angel of the Lord, I have sinned," etc.—Numbers xxii. 34, 35.

The judgment which we form on the character of Balaam is one of unmitigated condemnation. We know and say that he was a false prophet and a bad man. This is, however, doubtless, because we come to the consideration of his history having already prejudged his case.

St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John have passed sentence upon him. (See 2 Peter ii. 14-16; Jude 11; Rev. ii. 14.) And so we read the history of Balaam familiar with these passages, and colouring all with them.

But assuredly this is not the sentence we should have pronounced if we had been left to ourselves, but one much less severe. Repulsive as Balaam's character is when it is seen at a distance, when it is seen near it has much in it that is human, like ourselves, inviting compassion,—even admiration: there are traits of firmness, conscientiousness, nobleness.

For example, in the text, he offers to retrace his steps as soon as he perceives that he is doing wrong. He asks guidance of God before he will undertake a journey: "And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me." He professes—and in earnest—"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." He prays to "die the death of the righteous, and that his last end may be like his." Yet the inspired judgment of his character as a whole stands recorded as one of unmeasured severity.

And accordingly one of the main lessons in Balaam's history must ever be, to trace how it is that men, who to the world appear respectable, conscientious, honourable, gifted, religious, may be in the sight of God accursed, and heirs of perdition. Our subject then to-day is Perversion.

I. PERVERSION OF GREAT GIFTS.

The history tells of Balak sending to Pethor for Balaam to curse the Israelites. This was a common occurrence in ancient history. There was a class of men regularly set apart to bless and curse, to spell-bind the winds and foretell events. Balaam was such an one.

Now, the ordinary account would be that such men were impostors, or endued with political sagacity, or had secret dealings with the devil. But the Bible says Balaam's inspiration was from God.

It did not arise from diabolical agency, or from merely political sagacity:—that magnificent ode of sublime poetry, given in chap. xxiv., is from God.

The Bible refers the inspiration of the poet, of the prophet, of the worker in cunning workmanship, to God. It makes no mention of our modern distinction between that inspiration enjoyed by the sacred writers and that enjoyed by ordinary men, except so far as the use is concerned. God's prophets glorified Him. The wicked prophets glorified themselves; but their inspiration was real, and came from God, and these Divine powers were perverted,—

1. By turning them to purposes of self-aggrandizement.

Balak struck the key-note of his character when he said, "Am I not able to promote thee unto honour?" Herein, then, lies the first perversion of glorious gifts: that Balaam sought not God's honour, but his own.

2. By making those gifts subservient to his own greed.

It is evident that Balaam half suspected his own failing. Otherwise what mean those vaunts, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold?" Brave men do not vaunt their courage, nor honourable men their honesty, nor do the truly noble boast of high birth. All who understand the human heart perceive a secret sense of weakness in these loud boasts of immaculate purity. Silver and gold, these were the things he loved, and so, not content with communion with God, with the possession of sublime gifts, he thought these only valuable so far as they were means of putting himself in

possession of riches. Thus spiritual powers were degraded to make himself a vulgar man of wealth.

II. PERVERSION OF CONSCIENCE.

1. The first intimation we have of the fact that Balaam was tampering with his conscience, is in his second appeal to God. On the first occasion God said, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." Then more honourable messengers were sent from Balak with larger bribes. Balaam asks permission of God again. Here is the evidence of a secret hollowness in his heart, however fair the outside seemed. In worldly matters, "think twice"; but in duty, it has been well said, "first thoughts are best"; they are more fresh, more pure, have more of God in them. There is nothing like the first glance we get at duty, before there has been any special pleading of our affections or inclinations. Duty is never uncertain at first. It is only after we have got involved in the mazes and sophistries of wishing that things were otherwise than they are that it seems indistinct. Considering a duty, is often only explaining it away. Deliberation is often only dishonesty. God's guidance is plain, when we are true.

Let us understand in what Balaam's hollowness consisted. He wanted to please himself without displeasing God. The problem was how to go to Balak, and yet not to offend God. He would have given worlds to get rid of his duty; and he went to God to get his duty altered, not to learn what his duty was. All this rested upon an idea that the will of God *makes* right, instead of *being* right,—as if it were a caprice which can be altered, instead of the Law of the universe, which cannot alter.

2. The second stage is a state of hideous contradictions: God permits Balaam to go, and then is angry with him for going. There is nothing here which cannot be interpreted by bitter experience. We must not explain it away by saying that these were only the alternations of Balaam's own mind. They were; but they were the alternations of a mind with which God was expostulating, and to which God appeared differently at different times; the horrible mazes and inconsistencies of a spirit which contradicts itself, and strives to disobey the God Whom yet it feels and acknowledges. To such a state of mind God becomes a contradiction. "With the froward"—O, how true!—"Thou wilt show Thyself froward." God speaks once, and if that voice be not heard, but is wilfully silenced, the second time it utters a terrible permission. God says, "Go," and then is angry. Experience will tell us how God has sent us to reap the fruit of our own wilfulness.

3. We notice next the evidences in him of a disordered mind and heart.

Balaam did only what men so entangled always do. The real fault is in themselves. They have committed themselves to a false position, and when obstacles stand in their way, they lay the blame on circumstances. They smite the dumb innocent occasion of their perplexity as if it were the cause. And the passionateness,—the "madness" of the act is but an indication that all is going wrong within. There was a canker at the heart of Balaam's life, and his equanimity was gone; his temper vented itself on brute things. Who has not seen the like,—a grown man, unreasoning as a child, furious beyond the occasion? If you knew the whole, you would see *that* was not the thing which had moved him so terribly; you would see that all was wrong inwardly.

It is a strange, sad picture this. The first man in the land, gifted beyond most others, conscious of great mental power, going on to splendid prospects, yet with hopelessness and misery working at his heart. Who would have envied Balaam if he could have seen all,—the hell that was working at his heart?

4. Lastly, let us consider the impossibility under such circumstances of going back. Balaam offers to go back. The Angel says, "Go on." There was yet one hope for him, to be true, to utter God's words careless of the consequences; but he who had been false so long, how should he be true? It was too late. In the ardour of youth you have made perhaps a wrong choice, or chosen an unfit profession, or suffered yourself weakly and passively to be drifted into a false course of action, and now, in spite of yourself, you feel there is no going back. To many minds, such a lot comes as with the mysterious force of a destiny. They see themselves driven, and forget that they put themselves in the way of the stream that drives them. They excuse their own acts as if they were coerced. They struggle now and then faintly, as Balaam did,—try to go back,—cannot,—and at last sink passively in the mighty current that floats them on to wrong.

And thenceforth to them all God's intimations will come *unnaturally*. His voice will

sound as that of an Angel against them in the way. Spectral lights will gleam, only to show a quagmire from which there is no path of extrication. The heavenliest things and the meanest will forbid the madness of the prophet: and yet at the same time seem to say to the weak and vacillating self-seeker, "You have done wrong, and you must do more wrong." Then deepens down a hideous, unnatural, spectral state,—the incubus as of a dream of hell, mixed with bitter reminiscences of Heaven.

Your secret faults will come out in your life. Therefore, we say to you—be true.

Selfishness, as shown in Balaam's Character

BY REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, M.A.

"Who can count the dust of Jacob," etc.—Numbers xxiii. 10.

We acquainted ourselves with the earlier part of Balaam's history last Sunday. We saw how great gifts in him were perverted by ambition and avarice,—ambition making them subservient to the admiration of himself; avarice transforming them into mere instruments for accumulating wealth. And we saw how his conscience was gradually perverted by insincerity, till his mind became the place of hideous contradictions, and even God Himself had become to him a lie; with his heart disordered until the bitterness of all going wrong within vented itself on innocent circumstances, and he found himself so entangled in a false course that to go back was impossible.

Now we come to the second stage. He has been with Balak: he has built his altars, offered his sacrifices, and tried his enchantments, to ascertain whether Jehovah will permit him to curse Israel. And the Voice in his heart, through all, says, "Israel is blest." He looks down from the hill-top, and sees the fair camp of Israel afar off, in beautiful array, their white tents gleaming "as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted." He feels the solitary grandeur of a nation unlike all other nations,—people which "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." A nation too numberless to give Balak any hope of success in the coming war. "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel." A nation too strong in righteousness for idolaters and enchanterers to cope with. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel." Then follows a personal ejaculation: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

I. LET US CLEARLY UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS THE MEANING OF ALL THOSE REITERATED SACRIFICES.

1. Balaam wanted to please himself without displeasing God. The problem was how to go to Balak, and yet not offend God. He would have given worlds to get rid of his duties, and he sacrificed, not to learn what his duty was, but to get his duty altered. Now see the feeling that lay at the root of all this,—that God is mutable. Yet of all men one would have thought that Balaam knew better, for had he not said, "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it"? But when we look upon it, we see Balaam had scarcely any feeling higher than this,—God is more inflexible than man. Probably had he expressed the exact shade of feeling, he would have said, more obstinate. He thought that God had set His heart upon Israel, and that it was hard, yet not impossible, to alter this partiality. Hence he tries sacrifices to bribe, and prayers to coax, God.

2. We notice, secondly, an attempt to blind himself. One of the strangest leaves in the book of the human heart is here turned. We observe here perfect veracity with utter want of truth. Balaam was veracious. He will not deceive Balak. Nothing was easier than to get the reward by muttering a spell, knowing all the while that it would not work. Many an European has sold incantations to rich savages for jewels and curiosities, thus enriching himself by deceit. Now Balaam was not supernaturally withheld. That is a baseless assumption. Nothing withheld him but his conscience. No bribe on earth could induce Balaam to say a falsehood,—to pretend a curse which was powerless,—to get gold, dearly as he loved it, by a pretence. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do

less or more," was no mere fine saying, but the very truth. You might as soon have turned the sun from his course as induced Balaam to utter falsehood.

And yet, with all this, there was utter truthlessness of heart. Balaam will not utter what is not true; but he will blind himself so that he may not see the truth, and so speak a lie, believing it to be the truth.

He will only speak the thing he feels; but he is not careful to feel all that is true. He goes to another place, where the whole truth may not force itself upon his mind,—to a hill where he shall not see the whole of Israel: from hill to hill for the chance of getting to a place where the truth may disappear. But there stands the stubborn fact,—Israel is blessed; and he will look at the fact in every way, to see if he cannot get it into a position where it shall be seen no longer.

Such a character is not so uncommon as, perhaps, we think. There is many a lucrative business which involves misery and wrong to those who are employed in it. The man would be too benevolent to put the gold in his purse if he knew of the misery. But he takes care not to know. There is many a dishonourable thing done at an election, and the principal takes care not to inquire. Many an oppression is exercised on a tenantry, and the landlord receives his rent, and asks no questions. Or there is some situation which depends upon the holding of certain religious opinions, and the candidate has a suspicion that if he were to examine, he could not conscientiously profess these opinions, and perchance he takes care not to examine.

3. Failing in all these evil designs against Israel, Balaam tries his last expedient to ruin them, and that partially succeeds.

He recommends Balak to use the fascination of the daughters of Moab to entice the Israelites into idolatry. (Numbers xxxi. 15, 16; Rev. ii. 14.) He has tried enchantments and sacrifices in vain to reverse God's Will. He has tried in vain to think that Will is reversed. It will not do. He feels at last that God has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel. Now, therefore, he tries to reverse the character of these favourites, and so to reverse God's Will. God will not curse the good; therefore Balaam tries to make them wicked; he tries to make the good curse themselves, and so exasperate God.

A more diabolical wickedness we can scarce conceive. Yet Balaam was an honourable man and a veracious man; nay, a man of delicate conscientiousness and unconquerable scruples,—a man of lofty religious professions, highly respectable and respected.

There are men who would not play false, and yet would wrongly win. There are men who would not lie, and yet who would bribe a poor man to support a cause which he believes in his soul to be false. There are many who would resent at the sword's point the charge of dishonour, who would yet for selfish gratification entice the weak into sin, and damn body and soul in hell. There are men who would be shocked at being called traitors, who in time of war will yet make a fortune by selling arms to their country's foes. There are men respectable and respected, who give liberally, and support religious societies, and go to church, and would not take God's name in vain, who have made wealth, in some trade of opium or spirits, out of the wreck of innumerable human lives. Balaam is one of the accursed spirits now, but he did no more than these are doing.

II. NOW SEE WHAT LAY AT THE ROOT OF ALL THIS HOLLOWNESS :—SELFISHNESS.

From first to last one thing appears uppermost in this history,—Balaam's self;—the honour of Balaam as a true prophet,—therefore he will not lie; the wealth of Balaam,—therefore the Israelites must be sacrificed. Nay more, even in his sublimest visions his egotism breaks out. In the sight of God's Israel he cries, "Let *me* die the death of the righteous": in anticipation of the glories of the Eternal Advent, "*I* shall behold Him, but not nigh." He sees the vision of a Kingdom, a Church, a chosen people, a triumph of righteousness. In such anticipations, the nobler prophets broke out into strains in which their own personality was forgotten. But Balaam's chief feeling seems to be, "How will all this advance *me*?" And the magnificence of the prophecy is thus marred by a chord of melancholy and diseased egotism. Not for one moment—even in those moments when uninspired men gladly forget themselves; men who have devoted themselves to a monarchy or dreamed of a republic in sublime self-abnegation—can Balaam forget himself in God's cause.

Observe then: desire for personal salvation is not religion. It *may* go with it, but it is not religion. Anxiety for the state of one's own soul is not the healthiest or best

symptom. Of course, every one wishes, "Let me die the death of the righteous." But it is one thing to wish to be saved, another to wish God's right to triumph; one thing to wish to die safe, another to wish to live holily. Nay, not only is this desire for personal salvation not religion, but if soured, it passes into hatred of the good. Balaam's feeling became spite against the people who are to be blessed when he is not blessed. He indulges a wish that good may not prosper, because personal interests are mixed up with the failure of good.

We see anxiety about human opinion is uppermost. Throughout we find in Balaam's character semblances, not realities. He would not transgress a rule, but he would violate a principle. He would not say white was black, but he would sully it till it looked black.

Now consider the whole.

A bad man prophesies under the fear of God, restrained by conscience, full of poetry and sublime feelings, with a full clear view of death as dwarfing life, and the blessedness of righteousness as compared with wealth. And yet we find him striving to disobey God, hollow and unsound at heart; using for the devil wisdom and gifts bestowed by God; sacrificing all, with a gambler's desperation, for name and wealth; tempting a nation to sin and crime and ruin; separated in selfish isolation from all mankind; superior to Balak, and yet feeling that Balak knew him to be a man that had his price; with the bitter anguish of being despised by the men who were inferior to himself; forced to conceive of a grandeur in which he had no share, and a righteousness in which he had no part. Can you not conceive the end of one with a mind so torn and distracted?—the death in battle; the insane frenzy with which he would rush into the field, and finding all go against him, and that lost for which he had bartered Heaven, after having died a thousand worse than deaths, find death at last upon the spears of the Israelites?

In application, we remark, first, the danger of great powers. It is an awful thing, this conscious power to see more, to feel more, to know more than our fellows.

But let us mark well the difference between feeling and doing.

It is possible to have sublime feelings, great passions, even great sympathies with the race, and yet not to love man. To feel mightily is one thing, to live truly and charitably another. Sin may be felt at the core, and yet not be cast out. Brethren, beware. See how a man may be going on uttering fine words, orthodox truths, and yet be rotten at the heart.

Balaam

BY REV. J. M. WILSON, D.D.

"For I will promote thee unto very great honour," etc.—Numbers xxii. 17.

I wish to-day to tell you why this story is preserved for us, and what are its lessons. I shall assume that you know the outline of the story. First let me say that the reason why stories like this form a large part of our Bible is that this was the way in which moral lessons were given in the East. Stories, laws, and proverbs, not treatises and essays, formed the vehicle for moral instruction before there were books. Proverbs convey, in a way easy to be remembered, some great practical truth. They have been called the wisdom of many and the wit of one. A very few and briefly expressed laws are sufficient to prohibit certain crimes in a pastoral community; but there is a great deal which is too subtle for a proverb, and quite outside the range of law. How shall this be taught, and handed down from one generation to another? It must be something easily remembered, and that people like to hear. It must be a poem, a story; best of all a story in a poem. That will be remembered. Such a story in a poem is like a great picture. All the world may stand before it, and puzzle out what it means to teach, and learn from it as much as they can. Such a story in a poem, such a picture, is the story of Balaam.

This story opens to us one or two glimpses into the less lovely parts of human nature. But it is written for our warning.

One glimpse is this. It is possible for one of us genuinely to fear God, to have intercourse with God, to lay things before Him in prayer, to be, in a certain way, conscientious, to think of death and what follows death; and yet that God's anger should

be kindled with us as it was with Balaam, even while we obey Him; it is possible that we should go on obeying Him, and yet fall into some other hateful sin, and be acting in all main matters with the enemies of God. It is a great and solemn warning to us all, lest we, to some extent, may be doing the very same.

The secret of it is that Balaam feared God, and did not love Him. There is no security in fear. Many, many men fear God; but they find that fear is compatible with doing what they like best in almost all respects. They reserve some sort of obedience to God in some respects, but rule Him out of life as a whole. Balaam would not curse, but he seduced Israel. That is possible with fear. It is utterly impossible with love. There is no security for us against falling into the sin of Balaam, except in the *love* of God.

Well did our Lord describe as the great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy strength."

The story of Balaam should make each of us ask: "Do I love God, or only fear Him?" That is the weak spot in most lives. It is the want of love of God that makes inconsistencies so fatally possible.

And it suggests that where there is in our own lives that haunting sense of incompleteness and inconsistency and unreality, we should look for it in the want of love to God. To fear God and love ourselves is a very common and a very insecure basis of life and conduct.

Another lesson is this. The warning of God, conveyed to us by conscience, is often given to us, as it was to Balaam, once only. Once only he was told that it might not be. Then the hankering for the wealth, and the self-persuasion began, and he thought he might, at any rate, go with them, and see whether anything would happen to change God's mind.

First thoughts in a question of right and wrong are better than second thoughts. Which of us does not know this? You are moved to some generous action—that is the voice of God. Then comes in the after-consideration—would it not be a great trouble? Would not a smaller gift do? and a still smaller? and yet a smaller still? or would it not be wiser to postpone it altogether? This was the sin of Balaam, repeated again and again by those who, like Balaam, have the real fear of God in their hearts, have some religious insight, and honestly wish—up to a certain point—to be on the side of God; but will not give up what they really desire far more,—some solid, tangible, earthly success.

One more only, out of many lessons we might draw from this story.

Here is the real wish to die the death of the righteous. We cannot suppose that Balaam, a prophet of some Arabian tribe, knew as much as we, through the revelation of Christ, know about the after life, the life with God, or the eternal separation from Him; and yet the universal instinct of man taught Balaam that to die the death of the righteous is a supreme aim in human desire. And we all have it, not as Christians only, but as men. In our heart of hearts is Balaam's wish: "let me die the death of the righteous."

And yet the rewards which Balak offered were so visible, so tangible, that he grasped them, and gave up the future, and, as we know, he perished miserably, fighting against Israel. So it is with us. Who can count himself guiltless in this matter? This world, its comforts, its successes; our own desires, and loves, and hates, bulk large before us; right or wrong, we grasp at what we can see immediately before us, and let the future run its chance; and the story of Balaam tells us what that chance is, and how it turns out.

Finally, then, the story of Balaam is a warning, not to the wicked, not to the hypocrite, but to people like ourselves, who have the fear of God before our eyes. It is to show us how much better love is than fear; how needful it is to obey the first promptings of conscience; how infinitely liable we are to self-deception and ruin.

Balaam

BY RIGHT REV. HARVEY GOODWIN, D.D.

"Let me die the death of the righteous," etc.—Numbers xxiii. 10.

I propose to pass by all questions of doubt and difficulty, and endeavour to draw from such parts of Balaam's history as are clear and plain a lesson or two of great spiritual

importance; and I would therefore now state to you the character, in which I desire to represent Balaam to you. I desire to point him out to you as a striking example of a man, who knew the blessedness of serving God, and was desirous of obtaining the advantages of religion without having the trouble of serving God.

I wish always to impress upon you that religion *does* impose the condition of service upon us, that it is in a very real sense and not in an imaginary one that the Lord speaks of His yoke; and that though it be true that God's service is perfect freedom, and that the yoke of Christ is the condition of our receiving that liberty of which He speaks, wherewith He sets His people free, still the yoke is a true yoke to which the neck must bend, and the service a true service which must be performed. No religion, and especially not the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, can allow men to do as they will; it is something which binds them by vows and obligations and new duties; and he who is baptized into Christ has to maintain a constant war against the flesh and the world, and to keep the door of his lips, and guard against the overflowings of passion, and govern his temper, and exercise himself in all good works of charity and piety and devotion. And what Christ has told us is not that He has no yoke to put upon us, but that if we will take the yoke upon us we shall find it light; and so doubtless we shall; all the lives of saints and martyrs go to prove that the Lord's words are true. And Christ has told us moreover, that those who bear His yoke in this world shall wear His crown in the world to come; that godliness in this world is the seed of happiness for evermore; that those who serve are those who shall reign. But here we come upon the manner in which men are able to deceive themselves; they remember the promises of Christ, they forget or modify His conditions; they desire to reign, but they are unwilling to serve; they expect to reap an everlasting harvest, without having sown the seed. Who shall say what amount of spiritual ruin arises from this cause? The case is common, as every one will admit; nay perhaps in an age like our own, when the general truth of the doctrines of religion is admitted, it is one of the most common forms of delusion; men wish to die the death of saints, but they are not careful to live a saintly life; they do not see the awful connexion between their lives here and their lives hereafter, and they are content with scattering some few stray seeds of faith, or with holding certain doctrines, or with being convinced by some assurance in their own hearts, or the like, instead of setting themselves earnestly to work to build up a lasting habitation upon a life spent in the service of God.

And who does not feel the unholy influences of sin and the world, tempting him more or less to walk in this foolish way? If, therefore, we can see in Balaam the example of one, who in a remarkable manner knew what was right and how he ought to walk, and how his end might be peace, and who sighed for the happiness of those who feared the Lord, and who yet in a pre-eminent manner sold himself to do the devil's work and ruined himself in doing it, shall we not have a picture, upon which many may look with alarm, and from which all may gather some useful warning?

In the first place, it is plain that Balaam was a wayward and wicked man. It was not that he once committed a fault and was sorry for it; the history does not reveal to us the fall of a holy man overtaken by a sudden temptation, but reveals to us a stubborn and unholy temper as the very foundation of the prophet's character. For from the very first Balaam had received instruction concerning the Israelites and commands how to act; and when Balak's servants came to him, what had he to do, but at once to explain the commands which were upon him and send the servants back again to their master? And indeed the first time that they came Balaam did send them away; but yet I fancy there must have been something which invited their return, and probably it was the manner in which Balaam announced to them the message of God; he said, "Get you into your land, for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." Now this mode of representing God's message would, I think, seem to imply that Balaam was very willing to go but dare not; he does not tell the messengers that the people are blessed of God, and that therefore the thought of cursing them was thoroughly horrible to his mind; his words would rather leave the impression that he was himself anxious to go, but that God would not permit him, at all events at that time. The fact is, I imagine, that Balaam had an eye to those rewards of divination which the messengers brought in their hands, and that Balak's servants perceived this, and therefore thought that a more tempting reward would probably overcome his scruples; therefore when the messengers returned without Balaam, Balak sent more and more honourable persons and more

flattering promises than before. And Balaam did not seem displeased; he told the messengers indeed that he could not either bless or curse out of his own mind, but he did not send them away at once as those who were tempting him to deadly sin; he took them in and lodged them, and gave them some hopes that the command laid upon him might be relaxed, and that he might be permitted to go. And God acted towards Balaam, as He is wont to do towards those who kick against the strictness of His law; He allowed him partly to have his own way; if the men called Balaam in the morning, then He might arise and go with them: but having obtained this half permission, Balaam took his own way entirely, at least I judge from the history that he waited for no further summons, but got up in the morning and went with the men. Observe the waywardness of the man; he must follow his own way, and that a wicked way; must "run greedily after reward"; must endeavour to obtain some of Balak's wealth, even though the cursing of God's people be the price of it. And so it was, that his way appeared perverse before God, and that the Angel was sent to oppose him. And that I am not exaggerating the wickedness of his character appears from these two things; first, that when he had failed to curse Balak's enemies he taught Balak how he might ruin them by tempting them to sin, which is an almost incredible piece of wickedness on the part of one who knew all that Balaam knew concerning them; and, secondly, that Balaam actually died fighting against the Israelites, that is, died in fighting against those whom he had himself declared blessed.

This then is the first point, which I wish you to observe as being manifest from the history—the waywardness and wickedness of Balaam's character. And the second is this, that Balaam knew all the while that he was wrong; not one who sinned through ignorance, nor even through carelessness, but a prophet privileged in many respects to see, even beyond those of his age, into the deep things of God. He knew that he was not his own master, and that he could not curse the people, and he even told Balak's messengers that this was so; then why not there an end? it was doubtless covetousness that carried him on; but that is not what I wish to lay stress upon; what I wish to enforce is, that beyond all doubt Balaam knew that he was not walking in the path of duty. What the temptation was, how he drugged his conscience, or whether he took any pains about his conscience at all—with these points I have nothing to do just now; it is sufficient for me, that Balaam went upon his evil way with his eyes open to his wickedness: even if we were to extenuate the fault of his going with the messengers, and give him credit for being ready to go back again when he perceived the Angel in his way, yet still we have the broad facts, that after all this he deliberately took his side against the people of God, and gave most vile counsel against them, and died as their enemy. So that on the whole, I do not see how we can release Balaam from the charge of doing wickedness deliberately; sinning against light; having his heart utterly unrenewed, even while he was permitted with his lips to prophesy of the redemption of the world.

These points of Balaam's character and history lie open and manifest; and it is the consideration of them only, which is necessary to give force to the lessons that I desire to draw from the text. Bearing in mind what Balaam was, and what he afterwards did, please to notice the words of the text: he declares in the most emphatic language the blessedness of the people of God, and by consequence preaches the beauty of holiness; "how shall I curse whom God hath not cursed, and how shall I defy whom God hath not defied?"—words these, which, if taken in a sense which they may fairly bear, express as emphatically as may be the blessedness of serving God, and which might seem to be the utterance of one who thirsted "after God as the hart panteth for the waterbrooks"; and then, after declaring the future greatness of Israel as a nation, the text concludes with those remarkable words, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his"; words which, without examining them particularly, certainly express this, the desire to have as the best lot which a man can have, the inheritance of the people of God. Now I do not know that ever words were uttered, which on the whole express more forcibly and almost more beautifully the aspiration of a holy man's heart, than these words of Balaam; St. Peter, or St. Paul, or St. John could have said nothing more striking and more appropriate concerning those who died as martyrs for the faith of Christ; and yet these words came from the mouth of a man, who was covetous and wayward and wicked, who knew of his wickedness and never repented of it, but continued to add sin to sin; and he who prayed that he might die like the righteous,

perished in fighting against the chosen of the Lord. Were the words, then, merely those of a canting hypocrite? Not so entirely. Balaam did know, and did in a certain sense believe in, the blessedness of serving God; in fact, he had the evidence of his own tongue refusing to do its office, when he wished to curse those whom God had blessed; therefore he could not but believe, that there was a blessing belonging especially to those whom God loved; and therefore also we need not suppose that his words were utterly hollow, when he prayed to die the righteous man's death. For who would not do so? saint or sinner—there can be no question as to which has the most light in his dwelling, when the sun of this world begins to set; give me the man, who has been the most utter despiser of all religious thoughts during the time of health, yet even he will scarcely say that there is no satisfaction in the hope full of immortality, which smooths the pillow of a dying servant of Christ. Supposing, therefore, Balaam to have meant precisely what his words seem to express, there is nothing at which we need wonder, or at all events there is nothing inconceivable for what Balaam did was that which others do,—he desired the peace of Christ without His yoke, and the death of the saint preceded by the life of a sinner. There were the chosen people of God abiding in their tents, enjoying the safety which God gave them, protected even from the curses of their enemies because God had declared them blessed: how could Balaam do otherwise than envy their lot? it is true that he did not envy their past hard life in the wilderness; he forgot that they had been humbled and proved; or at all events it was no part of his thought to covet for himself that strict and searching discipline, whereby God had been training the Israelitish people. No, it was the people who had passed the desert and had the promised land at length in their grasp, whose latter end the mercenary prophet desired; it was the people come to their rest, not those whose rest remained in a country very far off, whose lot was an enviable one to a man who had the mind of Balaam; and therefore I will not accuse Balaam of hypocrisy, on the other hand I will maintain that he was quite genuine in his professions; and it is because a man of so wicked a life was capable of uttering from his heart a sentence apparently so religious and good, that I hold him to be worthy of study as a warning to ourselves.

Let me, then, now make two or three simple remarks concerning the lessons, which Balaam's case seems fitted to teach.

In the first place, Balaam teaches us the uselessness, I may say the *danger*, of conviction without repentance, or of a knowledge of what is right without an earnest pursuit of holiness. Balaam had religious knowledge, but he had no religion; he confessed the blessedness of being under God's protection, but he was utterly determined not to serve Him; and the persuasion of his mind, that Israel was blessed, never led him to the determination of worshipping Israel's God. Let us see to it, then, that we do not allow the mere knowledge of what is right, or even the habit of using our tongue in religious talk, to take the place of that life of God in the soul, which is based upon repentance, and nourished by prayer, and demonstrated by holiness.

And this comes nearly to the same thing as saying, that Balaam's history shews us the need of practical piety; piety while we have life and strength; sacrificing ourselves to God, body and soul, while we have something worthy of being sacrificed; curbing our desires and passions, before they die out of themselves; living a life of obedience and submission, while yet the temptation of the world is strong to follow a quite different course. What is the use of a man sighing for the death of the righteous, and a last end like that of the servants of God? the death is in general like the life, and the last end like the beginning; let a man live the righteous man's life, and then he will die the righteous man's death; let him have piety and faith and charity in his beginning, and then he will have hope in his end. God put us here to live as righteous men, and then to die as righteous men alone can. A far wiser prayer than Balaam's would be this: "Give me grace to lead the life of the righteous, and let all the prime of my health and faculties be consecrated to Thee, O Lord."

Lastly, the death of Balaam shews us in a very striking manner the uselessness of such religious aspirations as that in which he indulged. Balaam's worst sins were committed after he had uttered the pious prayer of the text, and his end was miserable. Oh, beware lest any of you be in like manner tempted to evil! you may see the excellence of religion; you may be even led to utter high aspirations for the rest, which remains for the people of God; but it is only a diligent walking in God's ways, a constant battle

against self and sin and impurity and worldly lusts and the like, a constant serving of God in all things which He Himself has commanded, which can ensure you against making shipwreck of your faith.

Balaam

BY REV. GEORGE BUTLER, M.A.

"Let me die the death of the righteous," etc.—Numbers xxiii. 10.

Balaam dwelt at Pethor, in Mesopotamia, and enjoyed a high reputation on account of the communications which God was pleased to make to him of His almighty will. To him the Moabites, alarmed at the destruction of their neighbours, the Amorites, and at the growing power of the Israelites, applied for aid. Balak, king of Moab, requested him to perform an office resembling that of a Roman fetial, and to devote the enemies of the Moabites to utter destruction. Conscious that he was but the mouthpiece of God, Balaam on this occasion waited to consult the Lord, and received a direct intimation not to curse the people, for that they were blessed. Surely, we might think, this would be enough to set the matter at rest for ever. Balaam thought so at first, delivering his message as he dismissed the messengers, faithfully, so far as words went; but how unwillingly the sacred historian says not. Nor does he relate all that passed in Balaam's mind between the first and second embassy. Doubtless many a scheme was pondered by him during the interval for reconciling his duty to God with the gratification of his worldly ambition.

When the second embassy arrived, Balaam's mind was more open to the inducements held out. Again he spoke as the Lord's mouthpiece; but this time he detained the messengers; hospitality, forsooth, required it! How could he dismiss such honourable men? Possibly the Lord may have changed His mind, as men are wont to change: the wish was father to the thought.

A second time the Lord appeared, saying, "Go, but what I shall say unto thee, that thou shalt do."

Now, what was the reason of this permission being granted we cannot certainly determine, but it is probable that God, Who knew what was in Balaam's heart, and Who discerned therein a preponderance of worldly motives and desires—God, Who will not tolerate a divided empire within the heart, but Who requires the entire affections of the soul, and undisputed supremacy in the breast of His creatures—gave him up to follow his own heart's lusts. Is not this the reason why God's Spirit will not always strive with man?—that He delights not in a forced obedience, but in the willing allegiance of the heart.

Whether it were a sign of God's favour or of His displeasure, Balaam prepared himself without delay to act on the permission. Early in the morning—lest haply the Lord should change His mind—he saddled his ass, and went forth with the emissaries of Balak: the enlightened believer in the one true God with the idolaters. Full of greed and eagerness for gain as he was, he nevertheless, had a sense more than they. He had *a sense of the Infinite*. God had revealed Himself to him in visions of the night, saying, "This is the way in which thou shalt walk." The hopes of earthly dignity must have become an irresistible passion within his breast before he could ever have accompanied those idolatrous princes on so hateful a mission—to curse the people whom the Lord had blessed.

Truly the prophet showed his madness—not only when he sought to kill the beast on which he rode, but when he offered to go back, in order to appease the Angel's displeasure. As if the guilt of meditated sin could be done away with by the sullen abandonment of a half-executed purpose! Even when he offered to return, his tongue only spoke, and the Angel, who knew his heart, would not accept his offer. Had he preserved his singleheartedness he might have been an example for men to follow. All hope of that was wrecked. With a covetous heart and divided affections he was not fit for the service of God; but he might be a *warning* to others: therefore God was to use him as a vessel made to destruction.

"Go with the men." This looked like liberty at first. Here let me entreat you to remark that there is a permission more to be dreaded than denial: that God frequently

shapes His dealings with us according to the state of our own heart. With the pure He shows Himself pure; with the froward He shows Himself froward. Balaam rejoiced in God's permission. He must now obey God's command.

Note one more point. Pride was, doubtless, a leading feature in Balaam's character. Never was he placed in circumstances so calculated to foster vanity. Selected by a neighbouring monarch as essential to the success of his arms against a foreign nation; solicited by repeated embassies; now accompanied by the princes of the land of Moab, on his way to the court of the king; we may imagine his dreams of aggrandisement, his cordial self-congratulations, centring around one quality which he possessed—the power of divination and prophecy. To this it was that he owed his sudden elevation. But what a lesson of humiliation was in store for him! The faculty which made kings and princes seek him out; the gift, which, when rightly exercised, would have been a real source of power; this he saw transferred to a brute beast—"the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet." It was not enough that a rival prophet should be raised up: he must learn his lessons from an ass.

And now he has come to Balak, his feeling of self-importance somewhat humbled, and with the remembrance, perhaps, of the drawn sword of the Angel before his eyes, causing him to have more regard for the will of God than he had started with. It is not unpleasant to him to be upbraided for his slowness in coming, still less to hear the king hold out prospects of future advancement. The prophet assumes a tone of virtuous moderation. He has learned his lesson well; and it flows as readily from his tongue as a studied impromptu, or as the formal and unfelt confession of humility and faith, which too many professing Christians pronounce every Sunday.

We are next introduced to a scene which for picturesque grandeur is almost unsurpassed in the records of God's chosen people. The prophet accompanies the king to one of the high places of Moab. From one of the highest elevations of that mighty wall of mountains, a portion of the Israelitish host, was descried. Together with the sight of their tented multitudes the word of the Lord came to him: reminding him of the choice of the Almighty, and suggesting the peace and happiness of a nation devoted to the service of the one true God. His conscience tells him that it will be well with them now, and well with them in the latter end. "Let me die the death of the righteous," he says, "and let my last end be like his." There can be no doubt that the desire expressed in this prayer was for the time, at least, genuine. It is not to be supposed that Balaam was unacquainted with the nature of true righteousness. The seven altars, with as many bullocks and rams, were not, he well knew, what the Lord required. Hear how the prophet Micah describes the interview between Balak and Balaam:—"O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

We cannot imagine that one who was so well instructed himself, so highly qualified to teach others, can have separated the death of the righteous from a righteous life. If the Scripture narrative came to an end here we might imagine Balaam "doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with God"; and afterwards dying in a good old age, pouring forth his last words in the ears of his children; a witness to all that the Lord, Who knoweth them that are His, is able to save His servants to the uttermost, and will not forsake them in their last hour.

But it was not so. A later chapter of the Book of Numbers tells us that Balaam was slain with the sword (xxx. 8), fighting with the kings of Midian against the Lord's people. As he could foretell the prosperity of the Israelites, it is clear that he must have gone to battle against them contrary to his better judgment. Therefore he died the death of the idolater, and the vengeance of the Lord was executed upon him.

Note here two things.

First. The uselessness of praying with the lips for spiritual, or any blessings, without a settled purpose of the heart—a resolution which immediately shows itself in our conduct—to lead a life conformably to the law of God. It is not enough for us to offer

up our prayers—sincere though they may be for the time—and then to go away and live as if we had never prayed. God will not accept us because we *pray* with the righteous, unless we *live* with the righteous. It is an easy thing, comparatively, to join in spirit with the congregation of the Lord's people, who are offering up prayers to Him. It is a light thing to approve in our judgment a life of faith in the Son of God, and that reverent obedience to His law, which shall bring a man peace at the last. But to lead a life in conformity with our prayers; not merely to pray for the Spirit, but to walk in the Spirit; not only to address our Saviour in the words of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life"; but to take up our cross and follow Christ in all things—this is the labour, this the work the Christian must propose to himself, and at once take in hand, if he desires to die the death of the righteous.

Secondly. Observe the contrast between a man at his best, and at his worst. Balaam, full of the Spirit, and desirous to cast in his lot with that of the people of the Lord, applies to his own case the conclusion which his better judgment impels him to draw when he gazes on the tabernacles of Jacob. When he said, "Let me die the death of the righteous," he declared in words his settled conviction that there was a happiness on earth preferable to the honours to which the king of Moab sought to advance him, and his desire to be made partaker of that happiness.

What became of this intellectual conviction?—for a moral conviction it can scarcely be called. Alas! it passed away before the stronger attraction of the gold of Balak, and the promotion which he expected from him. We find Balaam twice again endeavouring to win the king's favour, by cursing the people of the Lord, and twice compelled by the Spirit to utter words completely at variance with that intent. The gift of God was not to be bought by money, nor used against the people of the Lord. Balaam, who sought to prostitute his gift, must submit to its involuntary exercise, and then hear himself called faithless—a prophet of ill, taking the king's money, and failing to execute the king's behests.

But though he could not serve Balak as a prophet, he gave him the benefit of his counsel. And devilish counsel it was, in truth. St. John, in the Book of Revelation, speaks of the "doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication." The sin of the Israelites and its consequences are described in the twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers.

The destruction of 24,000 of God's people was not a light matter: and the Lord commanded Moses to visit it severely on those who had beguiled the children of Israel in the matter of Peor. Of those who fell, fighting with the Midianites against Israel, none deserved his fate more than the disappointed prophet, but too successful counsellor of evil, Balaam the son of Beor.

A few brief words, and I have done. When we assemble in the house of God to confess our sins to Him, and to pray for forgiveness in the name of Jesus; when we are led to approve those things that are most excellent, and mentally to resolve that we will follow them; we do not contemplate the possibility of falling into such an abyss of iniquity, as that into which Balaam fell. If any one should suggest to you now, when you are meditating on God's Word, or when you are kneeling in prayer, that you may hereafter betray a brother or sister into sin, and seduce a soul from the service of God, would not your indignant and honest answer be, "God forbid that I should do this thing"? Doubtless it would, dear brethren, and God forbid that you should do it; but lest you should be surprised in an unguarded moment: lest you should fall into sin yourself, and then, either by precept or example, for it matters not which, seduce others into sin, remember the first beginning of Balaam's sin, namely, the harbouring of a wrong desire. Then remember how Balaam prayed, how Balaam sinned, and how Balaam died.

Remember, too, that although Balaam was not a true man, he prophesied true words. The star did come out of Jacob, of which he foretold the rising, and the sceptre did arise out of Judah, when the kingdom of Moab had been destroyed, and when Balaam was no longer held in honour as the seer of the East, but had become a by-word for covetousness, for villanous counsel, for sinning against light and knowledge. One other prophecy remains to be fulfilled. "I shall see Him, but not now. I shall behold Him, but not nigh." Hereafter Balaam shall behold the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven. When all the tribes of the unbelieving world shall mourn because of the

rejected Messiah, Balaam shall see Him; assuredly not with joy. How unlike will his exclamation be to that of the righteous, "Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us!" Rather will he cry to the mountains, "Fall on me," and to the hills, "Cover me, and hide me from the wrath of the Lamb."

We, too, shall see the Son of God hereafter, and be brought face to face before Him at the judgment-seat. With what feelings shall we receive our summons to appear before that tribunal? God grant that we may so live as to be prepared to meet both death and the judgment. God grant that we may avoid all tampering with conscience, and all double dealing, and that we may retain a single eye to His glory.

Gideon

BY REV. CHARLES R. PARSONS.

"The Lord is with thee," etc.—Judges vi. 12.

It is not necessary for me to notice every trait in Gideon's character, nor even to take them up in consecutive order, nor yet to enter into the circumstances in which those traits were brought out. Let us, however, notice in the first place,

I. GIDEON'S CALL.

While threshing wheat by his father's wine-press he heard the Divine voice which called him to a great work. Imagine for a moment, that you see this noble looking man (for that he was of splendid physique we gather from chap. ix. 8) standing on his father's threshing-floor. Patriotic thoughts fill his mind, and his breast heaves as he thinks of his degenerate countrymen, and of his fatherland overrun by strangers. Sheaf after sheaf is disposed of mechanically, for in the secrecy and silence of his spirit he is pleading with the God of Israel to send a Deliverer. Whilst he is praying the answer comes. The Angel of Jehovah is looking on and Gideon himself is chosen. Precisely the same thing has happened times without number in the history of the Church. The disciples in the time of our Lord prayed for more labourers and He sent them.

Many of the world's most earnest workers have had to remain at the commonest and homeliest duties a long while before the Divine call has come. Moses must stay in the desert tending the flock for forty years; even Jesus must toil at Nazareth until almost within sight of Calvary. But God's time is never a moment too late. The main thing is to be, like Gideon, in the right attitude, and in a condition of mind that presents no barrier to stepping from one duty to a higher and nobler one. There is no need to fret and chafe. God knows where we are and will send a messenger at the appointed time. It matters little to Him whether like Gideon, we are threshing wheat, or like Elisha, holding the plough, or like David, keeping the flock. If He wills to call us to rulership and a kingdom, all local relationships and ties shall be only stepping-stones thereto.

The sight that Gideon saw and the tones that Gideon heard did not seem to awe or startle him, because he was found in an expectant attitude, his ears attuned to heavenly voices. In the light of the marvellous history which followed, the message he heard was pregnant with deepest meaning. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." It is deeply interesting to notice the varied ways by which God awakens men to their destiny. Sometimes it is done by human agency, or it may be by Divine impressions, or visions, or a burning bush, or a distinct voice from Heaven. To every one of us who are lifting our empty hands to God, asking Him to fill them with living service, this call will be sure to come as distinct and clear as it came to Gideon. And if we are found in the path of duty the tones will not make us afraid; our hearts will respond and say, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." We cannot tell what special line of work the Master has awaiting you young servants of the Lord Jesus, what unique vocation, but the very thought that He may be already looking on, waiting to see if you are ready, should fill your hearts with tenderest solicitude.

Gideon not only heard the call but he obeyed. He believed on God. When the touch of Heaven came upon him he took fire. His beginning is a lesson for each one of us who have taken upon us the great name of Christ. He began at home. His first work

was to purify his father's house, and in this he found a great reward. The throwing down of Baal brought his father to immediate decision for the true God. He who fights the devil in his own home and heart will conquer him in others. He who keeps his own heart right will reach the hearts of others. If the kingdom of purity has crossed our own thresholds, we may safely carry it into the homes of our neighbours. It has been said by an old divine that God can use a crooked stick, but not a dirty one. In our earnestness for the welfare of other people there is a danger of neglecting our own spiritual life. Said a young man who had been noted for his religious zeal, when he was dying, "Alas! I have kept the vineyard of other, but my own vineyard I have not kept."

II. GIDEON'S LOW ESTIMATE OF SELF.

In response to the Divine call we hear him saying, "My family is poor in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house." Gideon's victory over self was preliminary to his conquest of Midian. Said Moses, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?" Said Paul, "I am not worthy to be called an Apostle." In each case we see the consciousness of poverty, of weakness, of insufficiency. Where these are wanting God cannot proceed with His purposes and designs. He "chooseth,"—mark the word—the weak things to confound the mighty, and the foolish things to confuse the wise. Why? "That no flesh should glory in His presence." The flesh is prone to glory. "It vaunteth itself." But whenever it does *that*, even in least degree, it robs God. The mightiest spiritual results have been accomplished by men who, in themselves, were as nothing, and they have been the first to acknowledge this. There is a sense in which utter weakness becomes perfect strength. If we vainly imagine that our strength cometh of ourselves, then God cannot use us. We must be emptied of that worst kind of selfishness, self-esteem.

When Gideon found himself at the head of a large army he was still distrustful. Success did not fill him with conceit, but humbled him. Rather than depend on numbers, he sought all the more a sign from Heaven. Probably the rural life he led suggested the fleece upon the ground. Not content with one sign he sought another. In the answers which came we see how gracious and condescending was God to His chosen servant. He answereth him each time, and when Gideon was assured that God was with him he abandoned himself heart and soul to his great work.

This man's humble dependence upon God comes out in the history again and again. At the commencement of his mission tens of thousands flock around his standard. With such an army surely he had nothing to fear. How great, therefore, the trial of his faith, when God told him that thousand after thousand must leave him! By and by only the mere skeleton of an army was left, and that too, in the presence of the Midianites, who covered the land as grasshoppers for multitude. But his unwavering confidence in Jehovah failed him never a moment, and his faith was of more value to him than the vanishing thousands. Very soon two out of every three of his men were gone, and the foe was in sight. He did not falter, however, for he knew that God was with him and all would be well. When only ten thousand men were left, Gideon had to be stripped, weakened, and emptied still more. The ten thousand were to be reduced to three hundred. On the human side these were all that were left to him, but on the Divine side there was infinitely more—there was the word of the Lord, "By the three hundred men I will save you." Why all this weakening? "Lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, mine own hand hath saved me." Every circumstance that transpired reminded Gideon that victory and deliverance was only of God.

Before the battle he was to hear the stranger's dream of "the barley cake" overthrowing the tent. The "barley cake" symbolized Israel in its present distress; it was the food of the poor. The "tent" signified the nomad life of the Midianites—a life of rambling freedom and power. Thus the weak were to overcome the mighty. Then again, the methods used were all such as to depreciate man and to exalt Jehovah. Indeed they needed not to fight at all, but to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. The lesson they had to learn was the old one taught to their fathers when brought face to face with the hosts of Pharaoh. "The Lord shall fight for you." The sword of Gideon hung idle at his side. Their startling battle shout was "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" They had nothing to do, but to blow their trumpets and to break their pitchers in the name of God. What was the result? Israel lighted upon the foe as the dew falleth upon the ground, and of the Midianites there was not left so much as one.

How often, in our work for God, He has to take from us our fancied strength that we may be led to depend wholly on Him. Not only are the thousands and the hundreds taken, but the units also, and we imagine that we are left alone. Nay, not alone, poor doubting heart, thy God is left. Numbers and organization are nothing to Him. If He has filled thee with His Spirit, thou art a splendid organization in thyself. Do not say "I am poor and left alone, and of the people there are none with me." No, no! If you are a member in a dead church, where all is barren and icy and cold, if your own spirit is ablaze with the love of God, anxious souls will come to you enquiring the way to the Kingdom.

III. GIDEON KNEW HOW TO DO IT.

In other words, he knew how to conquer in the name of God. O that God may teach us how to do it! When a Yankee carpenter sent in his bill for repairing a ship, he set down so much for the timber, so much for the nails, so much for the time, and last of all, so much for knowing *how*. Many of you young working men know the *how* of many ingenious devices, not only in your various trades and callings, but also in your religious life. And in our church work we know how to organize, how to plan and scheme, how to get money, how to sing, and some of you know how to preach clever sermons, but I am anxious that you may know a greater and a diviner secret than any of these—the secret of holy communion with God, of daily abiding in His tabernacle, of living in such an attitude that you may always hear His voice, and when it comes obey instantly. The mischief of it is that we want our own way in preference to God's. Sometimes God calls us to get out of the ordinary ruts, to lay aside the regulation armour, as He called David when he went out to slay the Philistine. David was sent down to the brook to choose five stones, but of these only one was wanted. That one went straight to the giant's head, and killed him. It went straight because God was behind it. If God is with us, as He was with Gideon, we must succeed.

You ask, where is the secret of Gideon's power? We find it in verse 34. "But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon." In the margin we read, "*Clothed*." The Spirit of Jehovah clothed Gideon as with a coat of mail, and he became invincible. This was the secret of his mighty over-coming life. Without this his life and work would only have been weakness and failure.

Dr. Arnot was once travelling through Scotland when the train suddenly stopped. He looked out of the window and said to the guard, "What is the trouble? Has the water given out?" No, sir," answered the guard, "There is plenty of water, but it is *no' biling*." Ah! that is just it with so many of us. The water has not come to the boiling point. It is well for us to ask ourselves sometimes, do we believe in the Holy Ghost? A spirit-filled man is one who has risen to God's ideal; he can thresh the mountains; he is practically almighty. The worm Jacob becomes a sharp threshing instrument having teeth. By this we are to understand the energetic faith, the intense fervour, the holy passion, that makes its possessor an instrument of power which nothing can resist. His very language will differ from ordinary speech, and cause his words to fly like round shot through regiments of infantry in solid squares. No wonder that such an instrument scatters the chaff like the whirlwinds of God. As every tree is known by its fruits, so every man is known who is baptized with the Spirit. Such an one will have abundance of spiritual life, clear apprehensions of the truth, abiding heavenly-mindedness, and close and deep communion with God. In the New Testament we have many illustrious examples of being "clothed" with the Spirit. The early messengers of the Gospel were filled with the might of God. Robert Hall's remark on preachers is true also of all Christian workers, "the inequality of effect produced by different men is to be ascribed more to different degrees of devotional and pious feeling than to any other cause." Everywhere we have machinery; power is the thing wanted. "I gained no theology from Dr. Chalmers," said Robertson, of Irvine, "but I gained enthusiasm." Everywhere this is wanted. Like money, enthusiasm answereth all things. Men, who, like Gideon, have moved the earth, and wrought deliverance in their generation, have always been "intense." According to ordinary standards of judgment they were not prudent; but they were brave and daring, the very men required for the task.

IV. GIDEON WAS AN EARLY RISER AND A MAN OF PRAYER.

We find this out from Judges vi. 38, 39. "Gideon rose up early." In these words lie concealed another trait in the character of this remarkable man—he was *obedient*.

Obedience has a wakeful eye. It looks out for the morning watch, and is waiting to do the will of God at the rising of the sun. So much depends upon our ready and cheerful obedience. Disobedience will impoverish the heart and make it a wilderness of weeds. "Gideon rose up early." What for? To commune with God. When his strength and hope was best and brightest he went forth to meet with God. When the morning is thus sanctified, blessed will be the day. All great victories, like Gideon's, and a multitude of others, have been won in secret. He that has power with God and prevails has conquered everything. Settle with God first and there will be no difficulty with human accounts. In the matter of our early rising and closest exercises there is need for close and searching self-examination. Many and many a time God has said to us, as He said to His servant Moses, "Come up in the morning . . . and present thyself unto Me in the top of the mount." Instead of responding "Wake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early," we have passed by the Divine call unheeded, and God has had to say to us, "There is none that stirreth up himself; there is none that taketh hold on Me." Have we not almost forgotten the way to pray? Where is the pleading, agonizing, wrestling spirit of our forefathers?

Gideon

BY REV. G. MARTIN CLARIS.

"Go in this thy might," etc.—Judges vi. 14.

I like to look upon the Bible as God's album, in which He keeps the portraits of His saints. I like to take this album of our dear Lord, and turn over the pages one by one, and see first one saint and then another. I like to look at the portrait of one man who in his weakness was made strong; of another man who in his fearfulness was made courageous; of another man who in his discomfort was made calm; of another man who was a sinner changed to a saint. And so we look at Gideon. It is a story of a young man, full of lessons to young Christians, and applicable to those starting the Christian life; and I would say to them, "Trace Gideon's steps from weakness up to strength."

What are those steps?

I. First of all, SEPARATION. Look at his name—Gideon. What does it mean? Gideon signifies a destroyer of iniquity. I wish there were more Gideons. We could do with them very well. Are we known as destroyers of iniquity, beloved friends? Are we a perfect terror and bugbear to those who are living an unholy life? Do people ever know us by the name of Gideons? You say, "I am a Christian, but I do not know whether my name is Gideon." Listen for a moment. A Christian is a man who appertains to Christ, who is Christ-like, who is Christ-possessed—that is what a Christian means. What was the very object of Christ's mission? "For this cause was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." Christ was the true destroyer of iniquity; and such you must be, if you would be anything like a Christian. There can be no destroying of iniquity till iniquity is destroyed in us. We must first become a destroyer of the work of iniquity within, in our own souls, throwing down the altars which we have erected to sin, to self, and to the world, and then we can say, "I will follow Thee; I will be a destroyer of iniquity; I am a Gideon for God." Moreover, Gideon was the deliverer. Now, if we are Christians in the proper sense of the word, we long to do a little piece of deliverance too. Christ was the Great Deliverer. What did He say? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach . . . deliverance to the captives." If we are Christians, those who are Christ-like, we shall long to go and bring some out from the meshes and the thralldom of Satan into the glorious liberty of the children of God; but for that there must be separation.

II. The second step in Gideon's life from weakness up to strength was HUMILIATION. When the Angel of the Lord came to Gideon, he sat under the oak which was at Ophrah, and Ophrah signifies "the dust." It was the very place where Moses was when he put off the shoes from his feet before the burning bush; it was the very place which Joshua took up when, before the Angel over against Jericho, he buried his head in the dust. Are there any Gideons for God among you, my dear people? If so, you must know separation, you must know humiliation, you must know what it is to be cut off from

iniquity, in order to be destroyers of iniquity; and then you can take your place at Jesus' feet. Blessed spot! It is worth going into the dust to find the feet of Jesus, and you will find them nowhere else, because He buries His feet in the dust, for He will have His children get there. And that is the place of blessing—Jesus' feet; and therefore, if you want the blessing, you must get into the dust of humiliation, so that you cry with Job, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Though he was humbled, though he was in the dust, though he was at Ophrah, yet Gideon was doing a little something. He was doing what he could; he was threshing wheat behind the wine-press. He had only a little heap of barley there—that was all. It was not anything in comparison with the great destitution around; it would not feed a nation; but, thinks he, it may feed a family; and so he threshed it. Ah! he was doing a little thing, the ordinary common thing—what he could; and it was there God took him. Don't wait for something extraordinary to come to pass before you throw in your lot for service for God. Don't expect a miraculous door to open for you and a miraculous call before you put your hand to God's plough. You say, "I can do nothing worth speaking of." Then don't speak about it, but just go and do it, and let no one know anything about it. Do it for God, and in doing it God will use you. Was it not the Philadelphian Church, the Church of which it was said, "Thou hast a little strength," that had a big "open door" set before it—because it was the little strength which Christ could use? Mark you! God took Gideon standing where he was, living where he was, doing what he was, and He used him then and there.

III. The third step is MANIFESTATION. The Angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." It is the Jehovah-Angel of the Old Testament—Jesus. Where does He manifest Himself? Under the oak of Ophrah. That oak—oh! it is a wonderful place in the Bible. In the language of God's type-book the oak is simply a place of death and burial and starting of a new life. It was under the oak that Jacob buried his idols when he started for Bethel again, and it was there Gideon started for a life of service; and that is the place where God will manifest Himself. When he was in the dust, the Lord came. Do we ever know what it is to have personal interviews with God? Do we know the continuous presence of God moment by moment? Some say they want this, that, and the other—one more peace, and another more power, and another more purity, and another more blessing. They want more of the Lord. It is a fresh manifestation of the Lord that they want, and this would turn even the timid into mighty men of valour.

IV. The next step is AUTHORIZATION: "And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might: . . . have not I sent thee?" That is the highest commission any man can have. Though his family was poor in Manasseh, though Gideon was the least in his father's house, yet he required nothing more than this: "Have not I sent thee?" This is one of the principal credentials for a missionary—a missionary is a sent one. Do you long to be a missionary for God? You can begin the missionary work to-night—at once; you need not wait for some wonderful call: sent by God, you are a missionary. Young man! as you go up to-morrow morning to the City by train, you can begin your mission work there. Young woman! as you stand in the shop to-morrow, you can begin your mission work there. You want no more commission than this, "Have not I sent thee?" What has been the cause of your weakness in the past? How is it that you have not felt the help of God long, long ago? You have not caught His look. "The Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might." How is it you have not been catching His look? You have been looking down, and not looking up. The two looks must clash—your look at Christ, and Christ's look at you. It was when Zacchæus looked down to see the passing Lord that Christ looked up, and said, "Zacchæus, make haste, and come down." There was his authorization.

God looks upon you. Oh! look up and catch His glance. Claim the power of that Spirit. God-sent Gideons, you must prevail. The next time you go to your Sunday-school class, the next time that you go to that Band of Hope, hear it: "*Have not I sent thee?*" The next time you want to visit a sick one, a lonely one, a bereaved one, look up, and get the word: "*Have not I sent thee?*" The next time you want to face a difficulty which is confronting you—a difficulty in business, in the home, in the private life (it is a very delicate matter; you shrink, you falter from it)—wait a moment; look up; get this word: "*Go in this thy might: . . . have not I sent thee?*" When you would draw near to God's holy Table, the devil will hold you back. You feel you are un-

deserving—you are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under the Master's Table. Look up, catch His loving look, and hear this: "*Go in this thy might: . . . have not I sent thee?*" And you will find it such a blessed time. Christ will be known to you more than ever in the breaking of bread. "What is in a look?" says one. Everything, everything, when it is the look of Christ. It means authorization for the servant of God.

V. The next step is PRESENTATION. "And Gideon said, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, depart not hence until I bring my present." Have you ever brought a present to Christ? Have you ever given God the widow's two mites—just a soul and a body? Have you ever given Him the two mites which Lydia gave Him—first of all her heart, and then her house?

I think I hear somebody saying, "I didn't do it; I didn't do it." Well, bring the present to-night then—to-night; and as Gideon brought his kid and his unleavened cakes and his ephah of flour, and laid them upon the rock, and out of the rock there came forth fire and consumed the present, bring that present of yours to-night—a poor spirit, soul, and body; lay it upon the altar-rock, Christ; and see if the fire of God's love does not come forth and consume it, so that you say, "The love of Christ constraineth me."

The last step is QUALIFICATION. "And the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon." It is a wonderful equipment, that—a wonderful suit which the Father prepared for His child—a wonderful kit which the Captain has prepared for His soldier: "And the Spirit of the Lord clothed itself with Gideon," so that Gideon from that very moment was simply the clothes, the clothes of the Holy Ghost. There is no power, no energy, no responsibility, and there is very little value in a suit of clothes. They can do nothing of themselves; but when the Holy Ghost is inside, it makes all the difference. "And the Spirit of the Lord clothed itself with Gideon." Just what Moses was, as a rod in God's Hand, and just what the Apostle Paul was, an earthen vessel in God's Hand, so Gideon became nothing more than a suit of clothes for God; and God could use them. That was Gideon's confirmation day; he was called; he was chosen; he made his present to God; and now God confirmed and strengthened him for His work. Oh, what a blessed confirmation!—a blessed confirmation to be confirmed by God, indwelt by God, possessed by God, fulfilled by God, that God may use you.

Now Gideon could go against the enemy. Where was the enemy? Why, the enemy was in the land, the hosts of Midian were there like a flood, and God raised up the man Gideon. They were there as grasshoppers in the valley for multitude. But God said to Gideon, "I have delivered them into thy hand." And Gideon believed it. He did not doubt. He claimed the victory. He went forth, and he overcame.

But the enemy was nearer than that—the enemy was in the Home. Gideon was a true home missionary. He pulled down his father's altar; he cut down his father's grove. We are told in the twenty-seventh verse—mark it—that "he did as the Lord had said." That is worth underlining in your Bible: "He did as the Lord had said." Many come to-day to me, and ask me to give them a little piece of work to do. I say, "Go home and witness for God in the home." They say, "I can talk for God everywhere and anywhere rather than in the home." I say, "Go home and tell thy friends how great things the Lord hath done for thee." The enemy is there. The Divine order was the same for the first missionaries and for you: "Begin at Jerusalem," and then go to Judæa, and then to Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the earth. Down with the idol in the home, beloved friends! Be it a book, be it a picture, be it a golden calf—the greed of gold—be it some cherished sin, be it some clay idol, anything that puts God out of His proper place, that is an idol. Down with it! Be a true home missionary.

Ah! but the enemy was somewhere else. The enemy was even nearer home than that—the enemy was in Gideon's own heart. There was unbelief there. Hear his pleas when he is called for service. He says, "Oh! my Lord, if this and if the other." "Why then is all this come upon us?" "Wherewith shall I save Israel?" "My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." There is unbelief directly, and so his heart was not right to start with. Ah! you must commence there. That is the secret; that is the stronghold of the enemy; that is the true order,—first begin at the heart, then go to the home, and then go to the land. We always work in Christian manœuvres from the centre to the circumference. As a spider makes her web, so we make the Christian life from the centre to the outer circle.

Are there any Gideons here to-night? Know the place of humiliation—what it is to lie in the dust at the feet of Jesus. Know what it is to get a manifestation from God,

at a place where sin is put away and buried, and where you start for a new life, for a better experience, for communion with the Most High, for a place of service for the Master. That is the place where you will get the manifestation, and that is the place where you will get the authorization, and that is the place where you will get your commission from God; and when you have got that, you will not want for anything. You will bring your present; you will lay it upon the altar-rock, Christ; and you will say, as was said of old, "I give it all." You will know then your qualification; you will feel you are empowered by God; you will find that the Holy Ghost does work in you and through you. But begin with your own life, cast out the idol in your own heart first; then go next to the home, cast out the idol there; and then go into the world, and fight sin there. Be a home missionary if you cannot be a foreign missionary; and may you all know Gideon's secret of strength: "Strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

Gideon

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"Have not I sent thee?"—Judges vi. 14.

When Gideon's story opens, the land of Israel is under the stern dominion of the Midianites and their neighbours the Amalekites, who, in enormous numbers, have swarmed over it like a host of grasshoppers; and there is no spirit left among the people, nor any man bold enough to think of resistance. In the midst of the distress of Israel a cry went up to the Lord from some of them; and the Lord answered by an unnamed prophet, whose mission was to remind them that they had been long in idolatry, in disobedience, and in disregard of the Lord's commands (vi. 8-10). In the small town of Ophrah, in the district of the Abiezrites, situated on the borders of Benjamin and Ephraim, there lived a man of Manasseh with several sons, of whom the youngest was called Gideon. While all were in a state of miserable despondency, young Gideon was threshing wheat in a secret place belonging to his father, much burdened in his own soul, and when so engaged was surprised to find beside him one whom he recognized as an Angel of the Lord. Still more surprised was he at the salutation which fell from the Angel's lips, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Sinking altogether the personal allusion, he inquired how it could be that the Lord was with them, seeing the distress of Israel was so great? The answer was, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel. Have not I sent thee?" Then comes in the personal element which had been before excluded, and Gideon exclaims that his father's house is but a poor one in Manasseh, while he himself is the least and the youngest son. The answer given him by the Angel is, "Surely I will be with thee."

Barely recovering from the wonder which the visitor had caused him, Gideon's only anxiety now is to make sure that it is not a dream. He hastens to obtain an offering to present, and exacts a promise that his visitor shall remain till he returns. He then by direction of the Angel spreads his offering on the top of a rock, and looks on in amazement as the Angel touches it with the end of his staff, and it is instantly consumed by fire. Then Gideon awakens to the fact that he has been face to face with an Angel of God; and the sacred writer still further shows us in five different verses of the narrative, that the visitor was none other than Jehovah Himself.

So here we have the first step in the story of Gideon—God's choice of a man to do His special work in Israel. He chooses the least (ver. 15); and He discloses the secret of strength (vers. 12, 14, 16), which is, that the Lord will be with him.

The preparation of this man for his work is what is next shown us. God demands from him personal obedience to a most difficult command. The people of Israel had fallen into idolatry; the worship of Baal had crept in among them; and amongst those who had fallen into the snare was Joash, the father of Gideon. God's command to His young servant, then, was that he should cut down the grove before the altar of Baal that his father had made; that he should build an altar to God on the top of the rock where he had seen the miracle, and should sacrifice upon it one of his father's oxen as a burnt-offering. All this was accordingly done, with the help of the servants at night. In the morning the father became aware of the daring deed, and the men of the city clamoured for the life of the son.

The first step, therefore, in the preparation of Gideon was God's demand that he should risk his life in a personal testimony against idolatry in his father's house. The result of the bold deed was that the father and all his sons took Gideon's part, and so declared themselves also on the side of God. Confession of God at all hazards is the duty laid upon every soul which is called to a great work for God; and by it Gideon entered into a new position, and received the new name of Jerubbaal—"Let Baal plead his own cause, if he can." Such was the meaning of the name.

At this precise time, a new attack was made on Israel by the multitude of the Midianites in the valley of Jezreel. Gideon was called by God to lead the people in resistance. The language used is very remarkable. "The Spirit of the Lord *clothed* Gideon" (ver. 34, *margin*), reminding us of the New Testament words in which Christians are exhorted to "put on" the whole armour of God, and also to "put on" Christ. So inspired and so strengthened, Gideon sends out a call to the people of Abiezer to follow him, and then to Manasseh, to Asher, to Zebulon and Naphtali—four of the tribes of Israel.

While they are gathering, Gideon has a new dealing with God. He asks to be again assured that it is God's will that he, of a truth, should be the leader of Israel. In the threshing-floor where he had been engaged at the Angel's first visit, there was a fleece of wool, which, gathering in his hand, he held up to the Lord saying in his heart, "I am of no more account in the land than this miserable fleece; but if it be Thy will, O Lord, that I should be Israel's commander, give me this sign and assurance of Thy Word,—that this fleece shall be filled with the dews of the night, while the rest of the floor shall remain dry." As if to say, "I only in all Israel seem to have the thought that deliverance is possible. If it be so, and I stand alone, will God still accomplish His purpose, and deliver Israel by the solitary sword of Gideon?"

To ask a sign of God may be generally regarded as the weakness of faith; yet how can his faith be regarded as weak who asks a miracle, and offers, if the miracle be done, to go forth, though he alone should know what it is to be filled with the Spirit of God? The night of the test passes by; early on the morrow, Gideon takes up his single, symbolic fleece, and wrings it out, full of the dews of the night, upon the dry ground around. The sign which he asked has been given!

Yet once more faith falters. The work is so great; the post is so difficult; and the man feels himself so small. Faith asks again, Will God do yet a third miracle? If Gideon do not take this post, feeling it to be beyond his strength, will the deliverance of Israel take place even though it be by another hand? Will God let that poor fleece remain on the threshing-floor dry and untouched by dew while all the ground is covered else? If so, then Gideon will know that the work shall indeed be done, and he will have courage to undertake it. Again the night of the test passes, and early in the morning Gideon hastens out. Again taking up the fleece, he wrings it with all his might, but not one drop of dew is in it; it is dry like the desert sand: while like a plentiful rain, the dew covers all the floor. Then Gideon at last is at the disposal of God.

There were two other possibilities for the fleece and the threshing-floor. One of these had already long been a fact: that both should be dry, without a drop of dew. The people had been indifferent, and Gideon had been graceless. But was it not possible that, for the future, *both* should be filled with the dews of Heavenly grace? That does not seem ever to have entered Gideon's mind.

In reply to the summons sent out to the four tribes no fewer than 32,000 men gathered round Gideon's standard, ready to follow him to the field: a small force compared with the grasshoppers of Midian and Amalek, but a wonderful response to the unknown youth of Abiezer. There is hope again in many a heart. But God's dealings are ever strange when great things are to be done. God, Who had first to find a worker, and had found him among the weakest, and Who has then to prepare him by exacting a hard test of obedience and by performing no fewer than three miracles in his sight, has now to break to pieces the organisation which Gideon has already made.

Observe God's classification of the army of the tribes. Of the whole number, 22,000 are set aside as *fearful*; they are the cowards, who must go home. Nearly 10,000 more are *lovers of ease and comfort*, of no use on a desperate expedition; let them be sent away. In the whole host of Israel there are 300 men, select, hardy, unfearing, inured to danger, ready to go anywhere and to do anything at God's call. By these men, or by none, God will save Israel. Is Gideon ready to undertake the task? These men have taken the place of the dog, lapping the water with their tongues—they have neither pride nor fear: they will follow: but will Gideon lead?

We thankfully find that the prepared worker is still in God's hand, and is himself willing to obey in order that he may command.

But God has something more to do. Having reduced the army of Israel to 300, He now proceeds to disarm them all! Each man was to leave his shield in the tent and to put the sword in the scabbard at his side. In his left hand he was to hold an empty pitcher, in which was a burning torch; in his right hand he was to carry, not a sword or a spear, but a trumpet. They were but 300, and they were to be all disarmed!

Meanwhile the night had fallen, and God asked Gideon whether he was ready to go forth; but knowing how great the task was to the feeble faith of man, He told him that, if he must have another sign beforehand, he might creep down to the enemy's camp and hear it for himself. It is perhaps easy for us to express the wish that Gideon had been satisfied with God's Word and had cared for nothing more. He was not. He sought his sign, as we too probably should have done. He heard in the dark the telling of the soldier's dream, and discovered the fear of Israel which had taken hold upon their foes. Creeping back, then, to his own little camp, Gideon mustered his force and gave the watchword, "*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*"

Again only half-true. But we are thankful for the portion of the truth that is there. The sword of the Lord was to do it, but where was the sword of Gideon? It was never to come forth from its sheath. God's words are very precise—"I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand" (ver. 7)—"I have delivered the host into thine hand" (ver. 9). And Gideon himself says, "The Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian" (ver. 15). It was done already, and all by the power of God. Down the hillside into the valley of Jezreel the 300 marched, trumpet in one hand and pitcher in the other. In the middle watch of the night they blew their trumpets, brake their pitchers, waved their torches above them, and shouted forth their watchword, "*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*" The alarm in the night begat confusion; and confusion a panic, in which every man's sword was set against his fellow; and "all the host ran and cried and fled." Some in one direction and some in another, the host of Midian melted away.

It is as nearly the story of Jericho repeated, as anything in Israel's record: and that was the offer, not, alas! accepted, of God as Captain, Who should take all the land for His people, disperse all their foes, do everything by His own power, and leave them only to see, to wonder, and to adore.

The whole lesson, then, of Gideon is that a second offer was made by God to do this for Israel, if Israel were but willing, a principle which was not understood beyond the day of the marvel, and which was forgotten thereafter till the Apostle Paul proclaimed it,—"When I am weak, then am I strong." And why? Because God's "strength is made perfect"—not in the might of the many, but in the "weakness" of the few.

The subsequent years of Gideon are involved in mystery, and close in darkness. What became of him thereafter? This is always a most interesting question concerning the heroes of God. How often, for ourselves or others, we express the wish that deep spiritual blessing had come early in life: that it had been the gift and possession of youth, and not merely the gain of age and grey hairs! But we often fail to understand how hard it is to retain the place to which God has brought us. If by some great outpouring of the Spirit a man in early days does some great deed of sacrifice for the Lord, there lies before him afterwards the problem, how to live at the level of that life. And how often, in the case of the best and holiest, we have to note a strange silence which falls upon their future. Is it that no such life can be held fast, without progress to something even better than itself; while, to make such progress, a time of sacrifice is required, which few have entered and left a record behind?

What remained for a man like Gideon to do better than he had done? This, probably, that for the future he should have been a centre around which all the godly could rally; a source of teaching, of light, and of example, both for daily living and for pure worship. In other words, Gideon might have become in old age an earlier Samuel. That we might have expected, and that we should thankfully have found. But it is precisely in this direction that we find his faith to have failed. The third chapter of his life (Judges viii.) tells us of his continued prowess as a warrior, combined with tact in the ruling of men; represents him as in even greater vigour of character and will than before; tells us of a noble declaration, when asked to be the ruler of the people,—"*I will not rule over you . . . the Lord shall rule over you*" (viii. 23); and then immediately goes on to show how he set up for himself an ephod and an image at Ophrah. Turning his back on

the Tabernacle of God, which was then at Shiloh, close at hand, he set up his own place of worship, with peculiar rites and uncommanded forms. Something even of the idolatrous seems to have mixed with them. Instead of being a great blessing to the people, he misled them. Speaking of the ephod, the inspired writer says, "All Israel went a whoring after it" (ver. 27); and the cloud fell on himself and his children: "which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house."

"Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel," continues the sacred narrative—going back to the one great deed of his life, as if there were nothing more to tell in his honour; as if that had been the zenith of his fame, though it came so early, and all the rest but a waning light. The remainder of his days was spent in honour, in prosperity, in power, but there was nothing more to be said of his work for God. God was permitted to do no more marvels for Israel through Gideon. The offer of Jericho-like grace and victory was not accepted any more: it had been only half accepted at the time when, though Gideon's sword had never been drawn in the battle, the watchword was—"The sword of the Lord—and of Gideon!"

Jephthah

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"Jephthah the Gileadite."—Judges xi. 1.

Jephthah is the wild lawless freebooter. His irregular birth in the half civilised tribes beyond the Jordan, is the key-note to his life. The whole scene is laid in those pastoral uplands. Not Bethel, or Shiloh, but Mizpeh, the ancient watch-tower which witnessed the parting of Jacob and Laban, is the place of meeting. Ammon, the ancient ally of Israel against Og, is now the assailant. The war springs out of the disputes of that first settlement. The battle sweeps over that whole tract of forest, from Gilead to the borders of Moab. The quarrel which arises after the battle between the Transjordanic tribe and the proud Western Ephraimites is embittered by the recollection of taunts and quarrels, then, no doubt, full of gall and wormwood, now hardly intelligible. "Fugitives of Ephraim are ye: Gilead is among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites." Was it, as Ewald conjectures, some allusion to the lost history of the days when the half-tribe Manasseh separated from its Western brethren? If it was, the Gileadites had now their turn—"the fugitives of the Ephraimites," as they are called in evident allusion to the former taunt, are caught in their fight at the fords of the Jordan, the scene of their victory over the Midianites, and ruthlessly slain.

In the savage taunt of Jephthah to the Ephraimites, compared with the mild reply of Gideon to the same insolent tribe, we have a measure of the inferiority of Eastern to Western Palestine—of the degree to which Jephthah sank below his age, and Gideon rose above it. But in his own country, as well as in the Church at large, it is the other part of Jephthah's story which has been most keenly remembered. The fatal vow at the battle of Aroer belongs naturally to the spasmodic efforts of the age; like the vows of Samson or Saul in the Jewish Church of this period, or of Clovis or Bruno in the middle ages. But its literal execution could hardly have taken place had it been undertaken by any one more under the moral restraints, even of that lawless age, than the freebooter Jephthah, nor in any other part of the Holy Land than that separated by the Jordan valley from the more regular institutions of the country. Moab and Ammon, the neighbouring tribes to Jephthah's native country, were the parts of Palestine where human sacrifice lingered longest. It was the first thought of Balak in the extremity of his terror (Micah vi. 7); it was the last expedient of Balak's successor in the war with Jehoshaphat (2 Kings iii. 27). Moloch, to whom even before they entered Palestine the Israelites had offered human sacrifices (Ezek. xx. 26), and who is always spoken of as the Deity Who was thus honoured, was especially the God of Ammon. It is but natural that a desperate soldier like Jephthah, breathing the same atmosphere, physical and social, should make the same vow, and, having made it, adhere to it. There was no High Priest or Prophet at hand to rebuke it. They were far away in the hostile tribe of Ephraim. He did what was right in his own eyes, and as such the transaction is described. Mostly it is but an inadequate account to give of these doubtful acts, to say

that they are mentioned in the sacred narrative without commendation. Often where no commendation is expressly given, it is distinctly implied. But here the story itself trembles with the mixed feeling of the action. The description of Jephthah's wild character prepares us for some dark catastrophe. The admiration for his heroism and that of his daughter struggles for mastery in the historian with indignation at the dreadful deed. He is overwhelmed by the natural grief of a father. "Oh! oh! my daughter, thou hast crushed me, thou hast crushed me!" She rises at once to the grandeur of her situation as the instrument whereby the victory had been won. If the fatal word had escaped his lips, she was content to die, "forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance of thee upon thine enemies, even the children of Ammon." It is one of the points of Sacred History, where the likeness of classical times mingles with the Hebrew devotion. It recalls to us the story of Idomeneus and his son, of Agamemnon and Iphigenia. And still more closely do we draw near, as our attention is fixed on the Jewish maiden, to a yet more pathetic scene. Her grief is the exact anticipation of the lament of Antigone, sharpened by the peculiar horror of the Hebrew women at a childless death—descending with no bridal festivity, with no nuptial torches, to the dark chambers of the grave. Into the mountains of Gilead she retires for two months—plunging deeper and deeper into the gorges of the mountains, to bewail her lot, with the maidens who had come out with her to greet the returning conqueror. Then comes the awful end, from which the sacred writer, as it were, averts his eyes. "He did with her according to his vow!" In her the house of Jephthah became extinct. But for years afterwards, even to the verge of the monarchy, the dark deed was commemorated. Four days in every year the maidens of Israel went up into the mountains of Gilead—and here the Hebrew language lends itself to the ambiguous feeling of the narrative itself, "to praise," or "to lament" "the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite."

The deep pathos of the original story, and the lesson which it reads of the heroism of the father and daughter, is to be admired and loved in the midst of the fierce superstitions across which it plays, like a sunbeam on a stormy sea. So regarded, it may still be remembered with a sympathy at least as great as is given to the heathen immolations, just cited, which awaken a sentiment of compassion wherever they are known. The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, taking it at its worst, was not a human sacrifice in the gross sense of the word—not a slaughter of an unwilling victim, as when the Gaul and Greek were buried alive in the Roman Forum; but the willing offering of a devoted heart, to free, as she supposed, her father and her country from a terrible obligation. It was, indeed, as Josephus says, an act in itself hateful to God. But, nevertheless, it contained just that one redeeming feature of pure obedience and love, which is the distinguishing mark of all true Sacrifice.

Samson

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"Samson."—Judges xiii. 24.

The last words of the great captain upon the slopes of Timnath Serah die out dirgelike in a tone of solemn sadness. The clarion note of his exulting praise ends in that uttermost foreboding, "lest ye deny your God." It was the shadow of the future which lay dark and heavy on that prophetic heart. For when "the generation which had seen the great works of the Lord had been gathered unto their fathers, another generation arose after them which knew not the Lord, and did evil in His sight. They forsook Jehovah, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."

Then were the days of gloom and darkness. Enemies rose against them on every side. The old mountain fastnesses of the giant brood frowned again like gathering thunder-clouds upon the habitations of Israel. The dark hosts of Philistia from their sea-coast dwellings, swarmed up even to the mountain slopes of Judah, and spoiled all the labours of the sons of Jacob. The strength of the separated race seemed to have spent itself in the act of invasion, and to have left them weak before the children of those whom they had subdued and dispossessed. And so in one sense it was; but not as the fruit of the natural wearing out of their energy. It was but the fulfilment of the voice of Joshua's

departing warning. It was that "the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them."

Their peculiar sin was a direct and emphatic contradiction of the very purpose for which they were severed from the nations around them. Abraham had been called Isaac blessed, Jacob guarded, Israel multiplied, that there might be one man, one family, one tribe, one people—to bear witness amidst the ever-multiplying polytheism to the indivisible unity of the Godhead. For the bearing of this witness it was above all things needful, not only that they should worship Jehovah, but that they should worship none other with Him. This was the sin of polytheism: it for ever multiplied its altars. From the deep of his own inner self-consciousness, from the play of his own imagination, from the shadows cast by outward things upon his spirit, fallen man developed his gods, until, not only every high hill and every dark forest, but every desire of his heart and every appetite of his senses was embodied in some deity, who repeated in gigantic proportions the sins which were his own defilement. Against this vast system of abominable idolatry, Abraham's solitary wanderings and his altars to Jehovah, Jacob's sufferings and visions, Joseph's captivity and advancement, the forty years of Moses amidst the mountain-chain of Midian, the thunders of Sinai, and the sword of Joshua, had all borne alike their various witness. To maintain this witness and to hand it on, Israel had been planted in the goodly land which, to make room for them, had vomited forth its old inhabitants. The adoption, therefore, by them of the Baalim and the Ashtarothe into their system of worship was a breach of their God-given charter—a yielding up of their title-deed to the land of their inheritance. Every mountain and valley, every rock and river lifted up to Heaven their voices against this new pollution, and cried to Jehovah for deliverance from it. The cry was answered by the avenging bands of the Ammonite from his sloping hill-side, of the Amorite from his mountain fortress, and of the Philistine from his sea-girt plain. As the hands of Israel dropped Jehovah's banner their strength departed from them, and they became weak before their enemies. Internal disorganisation, too, enfeebled them. Then, at last, in their low estate they turned again to their God and wept before Him, and cast aside their idols and their Baalim. And their fathers' God hearkened to their cry and turned to them again.

But as the utterly relaxed sinews of their national existence were insufficient for the strain involved in rousing them again to make head against their enemies, the baring of God's arm called forth some unusual instrument through whom its power could act. Some one must be raised up with a might which rose above the withered strength of their ordinary institutions—who could breathe into their fainting hearts a new resolution, and gather into unity some at least of their disunited tribes. This was the judge's office. The choice of God marked him out. The hand of God separated him. The might of God strengthened him. He was raised up to do a special work, and he did it. He and his work must never be separated in our view, or we shall be sorely perplexed as we gaze upon him, and perhaps test and try to class him as though he were living and moving amongst ourselves. We shall never understand him by such a process; for God's witnesses and special instruments are never exempted from the influence of the circumstances which surround them. Through these circumstances God fashions and trains them. If it were not so they would be exceptional cases outside our sympathies, and could not be examples or instructors for us. The necessary effect of these circumstances is to imprint upon each one of them a specific and distinctive character. Whilst a strong common form of life thrown around men is a protection to the weak, it tends to diminish the strength of the strong. In the deep dark forest there is an almost unbroken uniformity in height and shape amidst its countless multitudes of trees. All are drawn up to the average size. But the mighty giants of the earth are found apart from their brethren; striking their own deep roots where they will, and flinging freely their vast branches to wrestle with every storm, and be nourished by every breeze.

Such were the judges of Israel; and we should therefore expect to find in them a certain eccentricity of act and character; the fruit of their largely developed individuality. So, in fact, they stand out before us; figures grand and majestic, but not of what we rightly consider a Christian aspect. As we trace them on the shifting misty medium on which we see the true image cast, to be distorted, even as it is repeated, they oftentimes perplex and turn us giddy as we gaze, unless we continually correct their strange and imperfect proportions by looking off from them to Him, the true type, Whose perfectness redresses for us their manifold imperfections.

In no one of the whole catalogue of the judges are all these distinguishing features

marked with such startling clearness as in the Nazirite son of Manoah. We can picture to ourselves his wild and wayward youth. As self-consciousness dawned upon him, he found himself a Nazirite. Even before he was born the bond was upon his coming life. The Angel messenger from God, who had promised his birth to the barren household, had, in the might of a Divine command, ordered that it should be so. As reason opened on that wilful soul, the story of his strange life was told him. With its earliest stirring was bound up the keeping of the mysterious vow. The growth of his unshorn locks, the abstinence from the familiar grape, the massive strength of his young frame, all severed him from others of his age—all stamped upon him a separated character. How must the father and the mother of the God-given, impulsive, solitary boy have gazed with something of an awe-struck wonder upon his moody youth! how must they have trembled at the dark violence of his passion, stirred often almost to madness, like the waves of the deep rock-bound lake, when the roar of the whirlwind lashes suddenly its surges into storm!

The years rolled on. The boyhood and youth of Samson, with their strange fantastic promises and disappointments, had passed, and he was a man. "Surely now at last," the longing parents would say one to another, "surely now at last we shall see some fulfilment of the words of Him 'Whose name is secret' (Judges xiii. 18), as to the Nazirite boy; surely now at last he will 'begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.'" The mother's brooding nature would instinctively move her to deal with Samson as a greater than Manoah's wife dealt with her greater Son, when, with longings which wellnigh swelled into reproach, she said unto Him, "They have no wine." But his hour was not yet come. What a strange mockery of their hopes must the first act of his manhood have seemed to them!—"He went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines; and he came up and told his father and his mother; and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath, of the daughters of the Philistines, now therefore get her for me to wife" (Judges xiv. 1, 2). Used as they were to his wilfulness, this was beyond all the precedents of his youth. With eager entreaty they besought him to give up the misplaced alliance—"Is there never a woman amongst the daughters of thy brethren, or among all the people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" But they spoke in vain. His only answer was, "Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well."

Yet the strange choice was really the providential overruling of what in itself was faulty for the fulfilment of God's secret purposes. Samson's vocation was altogether peculiar. He was not to be the commander of an army. The depression of years had so utterly degraded Israel that her sons were not fit for such an enrolment. Neither was he to break the yoke of Philistia. His wild, wayward, sensual nature forbade that honour being his. He was but "to begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." He was to show by supernatural strength and individual daring that the power of God, if it were but called out, would abundantly suffice to overcome the Philistines; and yet that the might which at one time enabled him single-handed to scatter the hosts of the uncircumcised ebbed utterly away so soon as he departed from his God. This was the lesson Israel needed, and only thus could it be taught them. He was as it were the embodiment of the chosen people; they could see themselves in him. His Nazirite condition represented faithfully their covenant state; his clinging amidst all his aberrations to that vow; his under voice of confidence in God; his perception that he had a vocation, a mission from Jehovah; his unshrinking daring in carrying it out by the matchless might with which the Most High had strengthened him; his well-nigh incredible success so long as he claved to this;—all this was to teach them that if they would cast off their Baalim and return unto their God, and cleave to Him, they would break in Jehovah's might the yoke of Philistia. His yielding to the voice of sensual appetite, with all the misery it brought upon him, was to show them in an example acted before their eyes that if they yielded to the sensuality, which was the great inducement to their idol worship, and joined themselves to the sins of the nations round, they too, like their hero in the arms of Delilah, would be snared, and blinded, and destroyed.

This then was to be Samson's service; thus was he to begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. He was not to break their yoke, but he was to show the trembling people that before the faithful man their strength withered and faded; and thus he was to keep alive in fainting hearts the hope of Israel. They were to see in him the tide of prophetic power ebb and flow as he claimed or denied his true relation to Jehovah. But to make this possible it was essential that he should have such relations

with the oppressing heathen as would lead to their perfidy, and cruelty, and contempt, venting themselves upon him personally so as to embroil him with them, and thus make it natural for him in maintaining his own personal rights to avenge the oppression of Israel. For no single man could make war upon a nation. In this sense only Samson's wild choice of a daughter of Philistia for a wife, because she pleased him well, was "of the Lord." The act was a forbidden one. The motives which led Samson on to it were wilful and sensual; but his fault was to be overruled for the carrying out of the purposes of God. His father and his mother saw but the evil of the heathen marriage, and so resisted it whilst they could, and then, according to their wont, yielded to the stronger will of their imperious son. They go down to Timnath with him to get for him the Philistine damsel to wife. By the vineyards of the city a young lion springs upon him with that roar which shakes the forest; but alone, single-handed, and unarmed, he seizes it and tears it asunder, as if it were a kid, and does not even tell his parents of the feat.

Here again how strangely does the typical character of all his acts of greatness float before us! His first recorded work of superhuman strength, yet wrought as man, alone and unarmed, as he goes down to begin his life-long fray with the Philistines, is this overcoming of the lion. And He, too, the One True Man, as man, immediately before the opening of His ministry, is driven of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; to meet as man, alone—left for the time even by the bands of Angels who, when the conflict was over, returned to minister to Him—the roaring lion who seeketh whom he may devour; to meet him and to overcome him in the might of the indwelling Spirit.

When Samson and his parents come to Timnath the damsel is formally demanded and betrothed to him as his wife; in due time he goes down again to claim his bride. The marriage festival is celebrated with great preparation and display, thirty Philistine children of the bride-chamber attending to do honour to their friend.

Again the strange similitude looks out upon us from the marriage banquet. For as it was at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, where first the power of the Son of Mary was miraculously manifested, so from the Timnath marriage feast came the first display of Samson's might against Philistia. Amongst the entertainments of the festival, according to the common usage of Eastern and even of Grecian feasting, Samson puts forth a riddle to the assembled guests. Philistian guile extracts dishonestly the answer by threatening to burn with fire the household of the bride unless she entices for them his secret from her betrothed. That hero heart of his, so strong against man's violence, so weak before woman's art, melts under her tears, and she gains and betrays his secret. Then there fell on him, as when the lion roared against him by the vineyard of Timnath, the burst of a Divine wrath. He saw the perfidy, the darkness, the godless injustice with which Philistia was oppressing Israel, and he goes down to Askelon and slays thirty of its chosen men, and brings their spoils to pay the wager which had been so basely won.

This Philistian perfidy had brought the marriage festival to an untimely end, and Samson returns in wrath without his betrothed wife into the land of Dan. By degrees, however, his anger cools, and he goes down again to Timnath to claim his wife. He is met by a new instance of Philistian faithlessness. For he finds his wife given to his companion, whom he hath used as his friend. This new insult he avenged by turning three hundred of the jackals, who even to this day infest in numbers the neighbourhood of Gaza, tied tail to tail, with a lighted firebrand between each, into the standing corn of the Philistines, who, when they had ascertained the cause of their loss, came up with savage violence and burned with fire the house and family of Samson's bride. The language of the A.V. would suggest that Samson considered even that an insufficient punishment for his Timnite father-in-law's treachery. But the original language implies the very opposite. It suggests that his soul revolted from this abominable barbarity; and that he resolved to punish wholesale: "If ye do such things I will not cease until I have been revenged on you," would be the truer rendering. Then he smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter.

It was after this act of heroism that he appears to have openly assumed the judge's office. He went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock Etam, and there the people of Judah came to him for judgment. Yet his hold on his countrymen was as yet small. His acts of vengeance on the Philistine people stirred up, as he doubtless expected they would, the bitter anger of those national enemies. They gathered their troops together and invaded the territory of Judah to seize the person of the terrible Danite. The con-

duct of the men of Judah exhibits in the strongest light their utter national degradation. Instead of gathering around their judge, and even if their unarmed and undisciplined multitude could not stand in battle against the host of Philistia, yet seeking to strengthen his heroic heart by their sympathy, whilst they watched for what their God would do for them by his hands, they resolved to purchase an ignominious peace by the base surrender of their champion.

Again there breaks out upon us the recurring prophecy of act. For so it was generations after, in their children's days, when the Mighty One came unto His own and His own received Him not; when the evil murmur was whispered, "If we let Him thus alone . . . the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John xii. 48). "Knowest thou not," said the three thousand men of Judah to Samson, when they came to him at the rock of Etam, "that the Philistines rule over us? Wherefore hast thou done this? We have come down to bind thee, and deliver thee into the hands of the Philistines." Out of the ages comes forth as the accursed echo of that voice of faithless fear: "We have no king but Cæsar." And like acts followed in each case: "When they had bound Jesus they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor." Even so did the men of Judah bind at Etam their Nazirite champion with two new cords, and brought him up from the rock. Both of the betrayed suffered themselves to be bound, because in those bonds they read the present Will of God and the road to a future and more complete victory; and the bonds of each were indeed the loosing of the prisoner's chains. So it was in the spirit world with the Captain of our salvation. So it was amidst the dark hosts of Philistia with the hero judge of Israel. "For when the Philistines" in triumph "shouted against" their captive enemy, "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax which was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands; and he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith."

Then in the moment of his triumph came to him to teach him his weakness without his God the sore thirst under which his mighty strength fainted. It was the time of wheat harvest, and as single-handed he fought the battle and destroyed the army of the alien, the sun of Judæa poured down its scorching midday rays upon him until it seemed that he whom the Philistine hosts could not subdue would perish in the agony of drought. He cried unto the Lord in a prayer which witnesses in its every word to his deep sense of his being in these acts no mere pursuer of personal vengeance, but in very deed an instrument in the hand of Jehovah for the rescuing of His people. "Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of Thy servant, and now shall I die for thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" He did not cry in vain, for in the rock at Lehi He Who bringeth water out of the great deeps opened its fresh springs, and when the thirst-bound hero had drunk, his spirit came again and he revived; and in grateful remembrance he named the spring, which for years afterwards distilled its freshness from the rock of Lehi, "the spring of him that cried." As we read of this extremity, this prayer, and this deliverance, can we forget an agony in the dark strife of the Captain of our salvation far more terrible, a prayer far more mysterious, and a succour yet more wonderful, when "there appeared an Angel from Heaven strengthening Him"? So over and over again, as we look deeper into the record, does the Nazirite judge prefigure the true King of Israel.

Great at this time was the glory of Manoah's son. Terrified by the utter failure of their last attempt, the Philistines withdrew themselves into their own borders. Samson judged his people, and though the heathen yoke yet dishonoured Judah, it was little more than an empty token of subjection whilst Samson was at hand to avenge upon their trembling hosts any act of aggression or of wrong. For twenty years it seems that this long pause lasted, and then the last and greatest of the judges falls before the temptations of the flesh, and ends in shame and ruin his life of bright but fitful splendour. It is a dark and miserable history, to be told in a few mournful words, to be stored up by all for closest self-application in their heart of hearts. The mighty man "who had burst the fetters of his foes could not break the cords of his own lusts." He yields himself up to the enticements of the evil and treacherous Delilah. The lords of Philistia seized greedily on the hope which this weakness of their great enemy suggested to them. They promised the woman large rewards if she could win from Samson the knowledge of the hidden abode of his great strength, which, according to popular belief, they supposed to rest in the possession of some amulet or charm, of which if they could rob him, they might afterwards securely bind and oppress him who had been their scourge and was still their

terror. With the perfidy of her class, she uses all her harlot wiles to draw from him the coveted secret. At three different visits he deceives her with fabled inventions. Once the sleeping giant is bound by her with undried thongs; once with new cords; once the Nazirite locks are woven together by her into one; and each time he is startled from slumber by the sudden cry, "Philistines upon thee, Samson!" Each time the awakening man manifests in a moment his unabated might, and his enemies, whom the cruel traitress kept hidden by her in the dark ambush of her chamber, dared not show their unsuspected presence. Then the attempt would be treated as an idle jest, such as frequent those chambers of iniquity. For evermore has existed the deadly conjunction which our own Milton's words of matchless strength have in almost a syllable so abundantly depicted—"Lust hard by hate,"—and so his suspicions would be lulled to sleep, and it would seem to be but a woman's curiosity in one of its unmeaning sports with her victim.

But his last revelation, though it concealed the truth, had come dangerously near to its sacred secrecy. He had dared to sport with those seven mysterious locks upon his head, which were the outward sign, the mysterious sacrament, of his strength. This free and dangerous handling of the veil drawn over the hidden secret on which depended the indwelling of the power of Jehovah foreboded all that followed; and it needed but another wearisome solicitation, another passionate entreaty, another sportive guile, to draw from him all the truth, and place him helpless in the cruel hands of the deceiver. This time she saw that he had told her all his heart, and she sent with triumphant expectation for the lords of her evil people. Then as Samson slumbered in the sleep of sin, the razor passed upon his head. The Nazirite locks were shorn, the birth vow was broken, his separate state was ended, the special presence of Jehovah had departed from him, he had become as another man. Then again the cry rang through the chamber of sin, "Philistines upon thee, Samson," and he rose with his dishonoured head, saying to himself, "I will go away, as time upon time." He had come from long familiarity with its accesses to deem of the strength vouchsafed to him as if it belonged to himself. But he knew not that Jehovah was departed from him. Then from their secret hiding-place rose up the ambush of his enemies; the dark forms cast themselves upon him, to be received at first with his accustomed scorn. Then came the fierce death-like struggle: the mighty man accustomed to his strength could not believe that it was gone, and yet it was in very deed departed, and he is overmastered, bound with fetters of brass, his eyes put out—that last terrible security taken against any return of his might—and he is led away a captive to Gaza. There he is cast into the dungeon and forced to do the hardest work of the meanest drudges, to grind corn in the mill.

What must have been the thoughts of that great self-willed heart; what the agony of that mighty spirit; what the pangs of that rebellious body! How must the caged eagle have beaten its mighty wings against the cruel bars of its narrow cage! how must Israel's deliverer have groaned under the insults of the Philistines! how must Jehovah's champion have abhorred the triumphs of the infidels!

Doubtless in that prison the work of God which he had so often counteracted was wrought indeed with him. Doubtless, in those lonely hours of darkness, with no familiar voice to cheer their blackness, with no sound of kindness to mingle with their gloom, conscience would arouse itself in all its might; doubtless he who needed so severe a discipline of love for his perfecting, had grace given him to yield himself to all its cleansing, purifying power; for his name, by the hand of God the Holy Ghost, has been engraven in the golden catalogue of the faithful; doubtless he, beyond all others, now that his earthly strength had departed from him, was, in the higher sense of the great words, "out of weakness made strong."

The days, the weeks, the months, perhaps the years, passed on—passed in the slowly achieved conquest of his will to the Will of God—and down in the dark hold of the heathen dungeon, in his blindness and his squalidness, Angels visited the lonely man, nay, the God Who had made his Nazirite strength so strong was with him in the prison.

At last the day of his deliverance dawned. The great feast of Dagon, the chiefest of the idols of Philistia, was come. He was the god of natural power—of all the life-giving forces, of which water is the instrument; his fish-like body, with the head and arms of man, embodied this idea of his rule. Sacrifices were this day to be offered to him; and amongst the chiefest of his honours, the great judge of Israel—the warrior who had been filled with all Jehovah's strength—was to be led forth to do the idol honour and exalt by his feats the delight of assembled Philistia in their hideous, misshapen god. The

vast hall is full from end to end of Philistia's nobles; the flat roof crowded by the swarming multitude. Amidst the taunts and triumphs of a brutalized heathendom, the eyeless captive is led in. He is guided to the central columns, that all may the better gaze upon this living trophy of their triumphant god.

Amidst all that thronging garrulous crowd he is alone with his God. Blindness, sorrow, captivity, and loneliness have done their work upon the solitary man. All his great soul is turned inward. He scarcely hears or sees anything around him. His thoughts are with the past; with the days of his Nazirite youth; with his early associations; with his witness for his God; with his wanderings from Him. What is there yet that he can do, what is there that he can suffer, for that Lord? There is but one last offering he can make; it is the offering of himself: he is again in outward form a dedicated Nazirite. Has the God in Whom, he now has learned, was all his early strength—has He come to him again? Will Jehovah accept even from one stained as he has been the offering of his all? He puts forth out of his deep heart the cry for one more gift of strength whereby the cruel sacrifice of his own eyesight may be avenged, whereby the enemies of Israel may be humbled, wherewith Jehovah may yet triumph over Dagon. He prays his last prayer; offers to his God his life; grasps with those arms of iron the massive central columns which support the wide-spanned roof, and bows himself with all his might. There is a shaking of the pillars; a cry of terror upon this side and on that—a wild rush beginning, and on it all settles down, with one loud crash mingling like the deep thunder with the cries of the dying, the vast proportions of the crumbling building. At last Jehovah has triumphed. Dagon has fallen before the God of Israel. The Hebrew judge has indeed wrought the destruction of the Philistines; the eyeless captive has done more than Samson in his might. "The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Once again, for the last time, from amongst the dark shadows of his fall and ruin, which seemed for ever to shut out the glory of his prophetic character, the typical similitude is seen to re-awaken, and the hero judge bowing willingly his soul to death that Jehovah may be magnified and Israel delivered, foreshadows to us the offering of Himself by the Great Judge of all unto the pains of death, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage; and as the body of the Lord was not left in the grave of the wicked, so it is expressly written for us, that the body of the Nazirite judge remained not with the uncircumcised amongst whom he fell, but that profiting, no doubt, by the first terror of that great overthrow in the temple of Dagon, "his brethren and all the house of his father came down and took him and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burying place of Manoah his father."

As we look back upon this history with its intensely dramatic character, its wild lights, its strange incidents, its glories, and its shame, gathering themselves round the hero chief, who evermore fills the foreground of the picture, we can scarcely resist the conclusion that the Hercules of pagan story was but the Samson of the inspired record distorted and robbed, by the thick vapours of the heathendom, of the moral teaching which breathes everywhere from the history of Manoah's son. There is the same exaltation of personal strength to an heroic nobleness, there is the same slaughter of the lion, the same single-handed scattering of his enemies, the same subjection of the hero's strength to the weakness of his own lusts, the same bowing down of his might before the witchery of woman's wiles, the same deceived end and premature death at the hands of the enchantress. But in Hercules man's appetites are deified, in Samson they show in undisguised harshness all the cruelty of their murderous outlines as the mighty man in his moral weakness allows himself to be cast down upon their rugged pinnacles.

This lesson, which lies upon the surface of this wonderful history, none can fail to read. The Nazirite separated to do the Will of God, strong against every foe so long as his vow, talisman-like, endures with him unrenounced; but falling through the weakness of the flesh; then led on deliberately to tamper with the very condition of his separation; then, partly by half consent, and partly by the fraud of the enemy, stripped of the very sign of his relationship to God; finding, too late, that God has departed from him, and with God the strength which, in his self-confidence, he supposed would still be with him as at other times; then bound by the enemies with whom he had tampered, cast into their dungeon a blinded, manacled slave, or led forth to be the sport of their bitter and triumphant hatred—all this is the story of each Christian castaway, seen through so

transparent a veil that we cannot fail to mark in it the typical outline of a baptism into Christ, with all its separating power, with all its spiritual might sacrificed for the lusts of the flesh, abandoned at last even in profession, and leaving one of the mighty ones in the prison-house of darkness, blinded, manacled, and utterly enslaved, the sport and mock of those evil enemies who crowd around their accursed chief in the dungeons of the lost.

But this is not the only lesson of this startling chapter in the book of inspiration. The ever self-repeating action of humanity and the many-sidedness of God's Word—every facet of the mighty whole darting forth its own separate gleam of light upon the mystery of being—make it read to us perhaps a deeper moral still. We may see it in how those who for the highest purpose have been endowed with the highest gifts, on whose intellectual powers that mighty spirit of God's strength has rested, that they may work some deliverance for His people, may idly throw away, first, their noble trust, and then, at last, themselves. Samson's gifts of bodily strength, which were the consequence in him of the Spirit of God exalting the ordinary powers of man's muscles and sinews into the heroic might of the Nazirite deliverer, are a type of the quickening of the higher gifts of intellectual power by the informing Spirit into a grander reach of exertions than the merely natural mind could have attained. The employment of these at the mere bidding of the selfish will, for sport, for gain, for the gratification of a vain daring, for the pleasure of unbridled speculation, is the fulfilment in a higher sphere of the casting away of the sensual, wayward judge of the tribe of Dan. His end is a type of the yet greater fall of these worse abusers of higher gifts.

Samson

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"Samson."—Judges xiv. 1.

From the lawlessness of Jephthah on the extreme eastern frontier of Palestine, we pass at once to a manifestation of the same tendency in a different, but not less incontestable form, on the extreme western frontier. At the same time the new enemies, in whose grasp we now find the Israelites, remind us that we are approaching a new epoch in their history.

"The Philistines" now present themselves to our notice, if not absolutely for the first time, yet for the first time as a powerful and hostile nation. In the original conquest by Joshua they are hardly mentioned. Their name appears to indicate their late arrival—"the strangers"; and the scattered indications of their origin lead to the conclusion that they were settlers from some foreign country. Unlike the rest of the inhabitants of Canaan, they were uncircumcised, and appear to have stood on a lower level of civilization. They were almost, it may be said, the laughing-stock of their livelier and quicker neighbours, from their dull, heavy stupidity; the easy prey of the rough humour of Samson, or the agility and cunning of the diminutive David.

Possibly the Philistines may have been called in by the older Avites, as allies against the invading Israelites, and then, as in the ancient fable, made themselves their masters. Be that as it may, the Philistines were the longest, and deadliest enemies of the Chosen People, whose hostilities, commencing in the close of the period of the Judges, lasted through the two first reigns of the monarchy, and were not finally extinguished till the time of Hezekiah.

Of all the tribes of Israel, that on which these new comers pressed most heavily, was the small tribe of Dan, already straitened between the mountains and the sea, and communicating with its seaport, Joppa, only by passing through the Philistine territory. Out of this tribe, accordingly, the deliverer came. It was in Zorah, planted on a high conical hill overlooking the plain, which, from its peculiar relation to these hills, was called "the root of Dan," that the birth of the child took place, who was by a double tie connected with the history of this peculiar period, as the first conqueror of the Philistines, and as the first recorded instance of a Nazirite. In both respects he was the beginner of that work which a far greater than he, the Prophet Samuel, carried to a completion. But what in Samuel were but subordinate functions, in Samson were supreme, and in

him were further united with an eccentricity of character and career that gives him his singular position amongst the Israelite heroes.

This was the age of vows, and it is implied in the account that such special vows as that which marked the life of Samson were common. The order of Nazirites, which we find described in the code of the Mosaic law, was already in existence. It was the nearest approach to a monastic institution that the Jewish Church contained. It was, as its name implies, a separation from the rest of the nation, partly by the abstinence from all intoxicating drink, partly by the retention of the savage covering of long flowing tresses of hair. The order thus begun continued till the latest times. It was as the first fruits of this institution, no less than as his country's champion, that the birth of Samson is ushered in with a solemnity of inauguration which, whether we adopt the more coarse and literal representation of Josephus, or the more shadowy and refined representation of the sacred narrative, seems to announce the coming of a greater event than that which is comprised in the merely warlike career of the conqueror of the Philistines.

Wherever the son of Manoah appeared in later life, he was already known by the Nazirite mark. The early vow of his mother was always testified by his shaggy, untoussured head, and by the seven sweeping locks, twisted together yet distinct, which hung over his shoulders; and in all his wild wanderings and excesses amidst the vineyards of Sorek and Timnath, he is never reported to have touched the juice of one of their abundant grapes.

But these were his only indications of an austere life. It is one of the many distinctions between the manners of the East and West, between ancient and modern forms of religious feeling, that the Jewish chief, whose position most nearly resembles that of the founder of a monastic order, should be the most frolicsome, irregular, uncultivated creature that the nation ever produced. Not only was celibacy no part of his Nazirite obligations, but not even ordinary purity of life. He was full of the spirits and the pranks, no less of the strength, of a giant. His name, which Josephus interprets in the sense of "strong," was still more characteristic. He was the "Sunny,"—the bright and beaming, though wayward likeness of the great luminary which the Hebrews delighted to compare to a "giant rejoicing to run his course," "a bridegroom coming forth out of his chamber." Nothing can disturb his radiant good humour. His most valiant, his most cruel actions, are done with a smile on his face, and a jest in his mouth. It relieves his character from the sternness of Phœnician fanaticism. As a peal of hearty laughter breaks in upon the despondency of individual sorrow, so the joviality of Samson becomes a pledge of the revival of the greatness of his nation. It is brought out in the strongest contrast with the brute coarseness and stupidity of his Philistine enemies, here, as throughout the sacred history, the butt of Israelitish wit and Israelitish craft.

Look at his successive acts in this light, and they assume a fresh significance. Out of his first achievement he draws the materials for his playful riddle. His second and third achievements are practical jests on the largest scale. The mischievousness of the conflagration of the cornfields, by means of the jackals, is subordinate to the ludicrous aspect of the adventure, as, from the hill of Zorah, the contriver of the scheme watched the streams of fire spreading through cornfields and orchards in the plain below. The whole point of the massacre of the thousand Philistines lies in the cleverness with which their clumsy triumph is suddenly turned into discomfiture, and their discomfiture is celebrated by the punning turn of the hero, not forgotten even in the exaltation or the weariness of victory: "With the jawbone of an *ass* have I slain one *mass*, two *masses*; with the jawbone of an *ass* I have slain an *oxload* of men." The carrying off the gates of Gaza derives all its force from the neatness with which the Philistine watchmen are outdone, on the very spot where they thought themselves secure. The answers with which he puts off the inquisitiveness of Delilah derive their vivacity from the quaintness of the devices which he suggests, and the ease with which his foolish enemies fall into trap after trap, as if only to give their conqueror amusement. The closing scenes of his life breathe throughout the same terrible, yet grotesque, irony. When the captive warrior is called forth, in the merriment of his persecutors, to exercise for the last time the well-known raillery of his character, he appears as the great jester or buffoon of the nation; the word employed expresses alike the roars of laughter, and the wild gambols by which he "made them sport"; and as he puts forth the last energy of his vengeance, the final effort of his expiring strength, it is in a stroke of broad and savage humour that his indignant spirit passes away. "O Lord Jehovah, remember me now; and strengthen me now, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged of the Philistines" [not for both

of my lost eyes, but] "for *one* of my two eyes." That grim playfulness, strong in death, lends its paradox even to the act of destruction itself, and overflows into the touch of triumphant satire, with which the pleased historian closes his story: "The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

There is no portion of the sacred narrative more stamped with a peculiar local colour than the account of Samson. Unlike the heroes of Grecian, Celtic, or Teutonic romance, whose deeds are scattered over the whole country, or the whole continent where they lived—Hercules, or Arthur, or Charlemagne,—the deeds of Samson are confined to that little corner of Palestine in which was pent up the fragment of the tribe to which he belonged. He is the one champion of Dan. To him, if to any one, must be the reference in the blessing of Jacob; "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel." In his biting wit and cunning ambuscades, which baffled the horses and chariots of Philistia, may probably be seen "the serpent by the way, the adder in the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that his rider shall fall backwards."

The scene of his death is the great Temple of the Fish-God at Gaza, in the extremity of the Philistine district. But his grave was in the same spot which had nourished his first youthful hopes. From the time of Gideon downwards, the tombs of the judges have been carefully specified. In no case, however, does the specification suggest a more pathetic image than in the description of the funeral procession, in which the dead hero is borne by his brothers and his kinsmen "up" the steep ascent to his native hills, and laid, as it would seem, beside the father who had watched with pride his early deeds, "between Zorah and Eshtaol, in the burial place of Manoah his father."

Samson

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"The woman bare a son, and called his name Samson," etc.—Judges xiii. 24.

Our consideration is particularly drawn to Samson, by the solemn circumstances which preceded his birth; they seem to say to us, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Prepare thyself for some great manifestation of God's power and goodness, such as He will vouchsafe to all ages, when His people have undone themselves, and yet are at any time willing in their captivity and distress to look to Him Whom they have forgotten. For the account begins by saying that "the children of Israel had done evil," and the Lord had in consequence "delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." Well might they ask where is our Joshua, and the victory, and the kingdom, and the power? It was then that the Angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah, promising that to her, though barren, a child beyond nature should be given of God; but requiring the strict dedication of herself from that time, and of her son from his birth, as a Nazirite to God—one set apart and separate by a strict consecration to Himself. And as God is wont in Holy Scripture to repeat by a second admonition, or a second vision and manifestation, what He has strongly purposed for great ends; so at the prayer of Manoah this Angel again appears with circumstances fully detailed to arrest attention. They asked his name, but he told them not, for it was secret; clothed with a Divine terror was his countenance, and great the mystery of his appearance; he would not eat of the kid, but when it was offered in sacrifice to God he ascended on the flame; and they fell on their faces to the ground, and said, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." And so indeed they would have died had they seen God otherwise than in Christ; but it was in Christ they beheld Him. And Manoah's wife said to her husband, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering at our hands." Thus then it was that Samson was wonderfully born, and as a child blessed of God, and moved by His Spirit, and made the instrument of His power, made to be as we may say of him as seen in Christ, "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

Yet further, we must consider in Samson the peculiarity of his gifts. Of Joshua we read that by the hands of Moses he was filled with the Spirit of wisdom for his great leadership; but this was not the case with Samson; he was moved by the Spirit to great miracles of strength, but there was no wisdom to guide a nation, or indeed his own steps. Though in bodily power more than a man, he seems to have been like a child in under-

standing; and certainly with this there was much of the beauty of a childlike disposition, as in his constant reference to his parents, even in manhood. There was something childlike in that reserve which accompanies inspirations of God and the strong feelings of childhood, when he slew the lion, and afterwards took the honey from it; neither of which things he mentioned, it is said, even to his father or his mother, to whom yet he so looked up as a child. There is something childlike in not mentioning what greatly moves us. There is, moreover, something childlike in his great exploits:—as in carrying away the gates of Gaza to the hill of Hebron; in his device of destroying the corn with the foxes and the firebrands; in his slaying the thousand men with the jawbone; in the young lion that roared at him, which he slew as a kid; in eating the honey as he went; in the riddles, too, and the bonds. There is a childlike grandeur and sublimity in these wonderful works of God. To those who quailed before the giant sons of Anak, God showed by Samson with what weak instruments He could work such deeds of prowess, while one who had in himself the power of great armies, yet was as a child in his parents' hands, looking to them; and as a weak man in the hands of a woman. And in what was his great strength? not in himself, not in power of limb or arm—but hung in the hair of his head, as if to show how slight the gift.

What therefore are we to learn from Samson? His history of such romantic interest is no doubt in order to exhibit in a most lively manner the power of faith. There is something wild and sublime, and, at the same time, most simple and attractive in all that is recorded of him for this end; his life is all supernatural: unarmed with spear or shield, but armed of God, like David afterwards, in faith he stands alone as the great saviour of his people, or one whom God was willing to make so if they would but look to him. The very wildness and strangeness of his life but corresponded with that purpose of God, as to show what God was willing to do, but did not, on account of their unbelief. His course, wild and irregular as it might seem to be, is spoken of, in a singular degree, as under the influences of the Spirit "Who alone worketh great marvels." To this may be attributed much in explaining the conduct of Samson, for God can dispense with His own appointments. It is said on the first mention of him as a child, "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan"; and when he slew the lion, "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid." In like manner afterwards when he slew the thirty; and also when he brake his bonds and slew a thousand men, it is said, "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him." These expressions raise his history into that which is quite beyond daily life.

And to this something may be attributed in explaining the conduct of Samson, of things which may have been done under a prophetic and Divine impulsion instigating or controlling him. Thus it is said that his parents "knew not it was of the Lord," that he took a wife of the Philistines. This expression indeed might signify as it is said in another place, "it was of the Lord to harden their hearts that He might destroy them"; implying that it was an evil permitted of God. Yet, in this case, it might have been an action, not evil but directed of God, who, for the carrying out of the great ends of His Providence, may suspend His own laws of separation between Israelite and Philistine; and like as when Hosea was commanded to take "a wife of whoredom," that it was with some mystery and allegorical meaning under the instigation of God. For beside the immediate object it might have this further meaning, that it represented Christ our Deliverer taking His Church from among the Gentiles; and to the disobedient Israelites of that generation it might have implied that this their course of disobedience would lead to that consummation, the rejection of themselves, and the Gentiles being chosen in their stead. And indeed it is very evident, when the men of Judah afterwards bound Samson, and then delivered him bound into the hands of the Philistines, that this represented the Jews giving up Christ bound unto the Gentiles.

Yet at the same time to Samson himself those things might have had their own lesson of instruction from the evils they brought upon him. Thus at last in his blindness and sore bondage, the loss of bodily sight might seem a fit punishment for the want of wisdom to guide the ways of his life; darkness and chains in the midst of enemies, and the round of toilsome labour at the mill might, as St. Gregory has observed, represent the blindness and toilsome bondage of Satan's service. His victory in death, mysterious and significant as it was, yet by his death accompanying that victory may indicate the punishment of a life that had not been without blame.

But God forsook him not,—and though he may not have acted well or wisely, yet may

we not hope that the blessing which he had at the beginning when on the first mention of him as a child, it is said, "the Lord blessed him," returned to him at the last again? and that the self-sacrifice of his life, hallowed to excellent mysteries and granted to his prayer, in that mighty deed of heroic martyrdom was accepted? As He Whose name was "Wonderful," appeared to his father, Manoah, and "did wonderously, as Manaoh and his wife looked on," and ascended to Heaven on the flame from off the altar that "went up toward Heaven"; so we may hope it was with Samson in the end, and that at his death from that altar of sacrifice he ascended to God. Such a view indeed is to him charitable; to ourselves profitable; and most suitable to one of that army of martyrs who "through faith wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." For "these all," it is added, "obtained a good report through faith."

Moreover, many things in the history of Samson are, as in other Saints of God, sanctified to us as figures and types of Him on Whom shall rest "the Spirit of ghostly might," even of our Saviour Himself, appearing as weak in our weakness, tied by the bonds of our infirmities, Who among His own countrymen "did not many mighty works because of their unbelief"; of Whom it may be said now as it was of old, "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldst Thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy Name." Thus even in his discomfitures and failures Samson speaks to us of One Who should always be in our mind. And some points in his life may be dwelt upon more particularly as containing such spiritual instruction.

The first deed of prowess in his life seems to anticipate the end. For our Lord is Himself called the Lion of Judah—and of Him came forth in death the life and food of His people; even that Word of life which is sweeter to the soul than honey and the honeycomb. From death "the eater" that devourer all things hath come forth meat, even He Who hath said, "My Flesh is meat indeed." Wait awhile, and the multitude of the nations have gathered like a swarm in that death, and from thence derive life. But of that lion and its death, strange to say, Samson spake not, it is added, to his father or his mother. And still more strange of the honey, thence afterwards ensuing, Samson, it is said, told not his father or his mother. For thus was the death of Christ a mystery and a secret, and so were all the consolations thence derived, which Israel knew not, and could not understand. Nay, it was as a "riddle" for a long time—"to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,"—imparted only to and through her, who was taken to be the Church of God from the defiled nations of heathenism.

But more particularly in the death of Samson do we see our Lord and Saviour, when bound and set at nought, and blindfolded, and beaten in the hands of His enemies. He willingly gave up His life, and by His death overcame all the power of the enemy, and more than by His life subdued all the kingdoms of darkness. And a fulfilment of this there may be again, when the sun of this world shall go down, and the walls of the universe shall shake and fall. He says in the Psalms, "The earth is weak and all the inhabitants thereof, I bear up the pillars of it." But a time shall come when the faith shall fail and love shall wax cold, and He Who is the great Deliverer of His people shall be in darkness and in bonds; then when they shall say, "peace and all things are safe," the Strong Man shall awake, and suddenly there shall be a cry,—the earth is departing, the pillars of Heaven are shaken, and the Day is come.

Yet one word more in conclusion; the strength of Samson was in his hair, that which could least of all have any thing to do with means of strength; in order to show that his power was all of God; those unshorn locks were signs of his being a Nazirite, dedicated to God even before his birth; there was a power from that dedication which lasted all his life. "There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazirite unto God from my mother's womb; if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man." Thus with us our power is from our dedication to God at Baptism; water, the weakest of all things, could have nothing to do of itself with spiritual strength; but God has so appointed it as a sign and means; when we become defiled with sin, then is our strength gone from us; but after deep repentance and humiliation it may again return, and we at length may be so recovered, that when the last great trial comes we may in death prevail;—the strong man be cast

out of his place by One Stronger than he; and in and through Christ "death be swallowed up in victory."

Samson

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"The Spirit of the Lord began to move him," etc.—Judges xiii. 25.

There are few prejudices more deeply fixed and widely spread, than some which concern the operation of the Holy Spirit. These confine His means of grace to a sort of inspiration, forgetting that this, when it comes, is not merely the operation, but the final result of His course of operation. That operation had, in fact, begun long before it was felt; it had been supplying causes, furnishing instruction, generating, nursing, ripening opportunities, preparing circumstances and conditions; and thus, even the unconscious baby may be a partaker of His grace. So far, therefore, from approaching our spirits immediately in His operation, He may only be preparing His way to it, by providential arrangements which, in the first instance, visibly and perceptibly affect our bodies and souls. For instance, even the competent expounder of His Word, is not inspired immediately for it, as the ignorant fanatic thinks, but taught by a long train of previous instruction, which has supplied him with the requisite knowledge of the original language, and that even from books written in an evil spirit, has given him a good acquaintance with the things of the world around him, has brought him accurate discernment of characters of mind, and large knowledge and experience of the human heart. These are gifts necessary to the expounder's qualification, and must be added to that mind in Christ, without which none can be His disciple. Nor have these gifts always a point not to be mistaken, and a permanence not to be moved, as some seem to think that things heavenly should always have. We see how the Corinthians could both mistake their point, and abuse them; and St. Paul, after the Lord's example, deals in warnings against the danger of losing them. Part of their operation, alas! is always consumed in maintaining the individual struggle against the old man, as God says, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." Then comes forth the remnant in the social and public service of the man which will be the more efficacious in proportion to the quantity which he brings to his work, and that will depend upon what and how he has already spent.

We could not have had a more lively illustration of this external working of the Spirit, than that which Scripture supplies us with in the history of Samson. There, too, we have the warning of an extraordinary gift abused with an infatuation of recklessness, almost as extraordinary. A melancholy history therefore it is. With children, indeed, it has always been naturally a favourite, from the romantic feats of the champion of Israel; to men it should be a severe and constant study, from his deplorable falling off and miserable end.

We commence with the repetition of the old and miserable account of the children of Israel, having fallen back again into the idolatry of their neighbours, and being delivered, by God's vengeance, into the hand of the Philistines. He did not, however, utterly forsake His people, and in the very depth of their affliction prepared the means of their deliverance, and comforted His people. The Lord sent His Angel to appear to the wife of Manoah, a man of Dan. She had hitherto been barren, and now received the consoling promise that she should conceive and bear a son. In answer to the prayer of Manoah, who, on information of this heavenly visit, had entreated for a second visit, that they might receive directions concerning the education of the child, the Angel re-appeared to his wife, who called him to the celestial presence. They were directed to pay particular attention to the injunctions which had been given at the first visit. These, which accompanied a promise that the child should begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, directed that he should be brought up a Nazirite unto God, from the womb to the day of his death, wearing, according to the custom of such dedication, his hair unshorn, and drinking no wine or strong drink. The Angel vanished, ascending in the flame of the altar, and left Manoah and his wife overwhelmed with fear and awe.

In due time, the child of this gracious promise was born. And the Lord blessed him as he grew up, and the Spirit of God began to move him on occasions, according to his peculiar destination. Thus far we have the pleasure of beholding him under circumstances which bring to mind, from their extraordinary resemblance, the early history of John the Baptist. But the forerunner of Christ, the preacher of repentance for the remission of sins, faithfully executed his office. Whereas, the beginner of the deliverance of Israel from his bondage, having a bodily, and not a spiritual work before him, gave way to the flesh, and fell short of his charge. John began his course with the proclaiming from an austere life, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. Samson began his with an act directly contrary to the purposes of his mission. If he had expressly intended to nullify its effect, he could hardly have done otherwise; for God had strictly forbidden His people to intermarry with the Canaanites, whose abominable idolatries would thus find entrance and nurture among them. And at this very moment they were smarting under God's judgment, for the introduction of this sin into their land. In a champion of Israel, therefore, we should look for one who would set his face as flint against every thing which could in any way encourage the notorious propensity of his countrymen, and would exhibit an example of the strictest obedience to every law of God on this particular. And yet we find him taking a wife from among the Philistines at the very outset of his course. It is indeed stated that this came of the Lord, Who was seeking an occasion against the Philistines; but it came in the same way as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which was also to serve the occasion of the Lord. According to the established course of His providence, the Lord was bringing good out of evil, and turning the purposes of sinful man to the accomplishment of His own holy designs. And so far from affording any excuse in our minds for Samson, it should be to them a proof that he had already lowered himself, from the condition of a wise and good servant, to that of a hard unfeeling tool. Thus he gave free scope to the lust of his eye, and preferred the gratification of the flesh to the guidance of the Spirit.

We must not, however, in justice to him, overlook the temptation which peculiarly beset his calling. The frame of body which is adapted to prodigious efforts of strength, is apt to have its carnal affections in great power, and the nurturing and training of that strength confines the attention to the body, fosters carnal propensities, and draws it off from the mind. Hence we seldom, if ever, see extraordinary strength of body accompanied with much power of mind. It would seem, indeed, too bountiful a gift to one man, that he should at the same time remarkably excel in powers, both of body and mind. And our old legends, which represent giants as gross dupes, seem to go upon the common experience of mankind. Samson, however, had less excuse than such persons usually have, because the abstinent habits of his profession of a Nazirite, precluded him from many incitations to which they are subject, and his religious education, and consciousness of high mission, should have done the rest. Here, accordingly, lay the fountain of all his misfortunes. He abused his gifts in such a manner, that his feats of supernatural strength, instead of being exercised in declared warfare against the enemies of his God and country, were irregularly put forth at the instigation of most unworthy and even disgraceful motives, and in the sudden brawls and predatory attacks arising out of his amours. We might, indeed, naturally have expected much of the petty and inglorious achievement which distinguishes border warfare in rude times; but a deliverer of his country, still more of God's own people, under God's own commission, should have exhibited something, if not superior, yet not inferior to the common spirit of such contests.

A suspicion of the fidelity of his wife, and no desire of vindicating his country's wrongs, or God's honour, gave rise to his first recorded exploit against the Philistines. He went down in the fulness of strength accorded to him by the Spirit of the Lord, Who was serving His own purpose, and not Samson's, and insulted the whole city of Ashkelon, by slaying thirty of the inhabitants, and taking their spoil. Thus Samson may be said to have made the beginning of the deliverance of Israel; but he had it not in view: he acted upon a mere selfish purpose, which having been conceived, God reduced the performance of it, without Samson's will or care, into the order of His own wise and merciful operations, and seconded it with extraordinary help.

Suspicion ended in the utter abandonment of this wife, after her father's refusal to give back to him one whom he had so neglected. His revenge led to some wonderful exhibitions of his strength, which enabled him, with such a weapon as the jaw-bone of an ass, to slay a thousand men; and God still recognized him for the appointed deliverer

of His people, by supplying him with water out of the jaw, when he was sore athirst after such a feat. The greater, therefore, is our disappointment to find the very next fact in the narrative of his deeds, to be an illicit intercourse with a woman of Gaza. Out of this, however, resulted one of his most extraordinary feats, the carrying the gates of Gaza on his shoulders to the top of the hill that is above Hebron; and by such deeds, he gradually gathered his countrymen around him, and gained such influence by that quality which so peculiarly fitted their hour of need, that he was chosen judge of Israel, and presided over their commonwealth for twenty years. His success struck extreme terror into the hearts of the Philistines, and infused corresponding courage into the bosoms of his countrymen, and thus he laid the foundation of that continued spirit of resistance, which ultimately, not only delivered them from the yoke of the oppressor, but enabled them in turn to impose it on him. This was the limit of his mission. He was but to begin to deliver Israel; that deliverance was left for no less a person than David to accomplish. He was but David's forerunner, as John afterwards was of David's antitype, the Christ.

Well had it been for Samson, if, when his mission was accomplished, the consequences of his deeds, to which God now left him open, had been as honourable as those that came upon John, when he had finished his public course! Both, indeed, had a prison for their lot. But the fearless rebuke of sin in high places brought the prophet of Israel into his misfortune; the indulgence of sin, with no fear of God before his eyes, brought on the champion of Israel a just judgment, in the appointed course of moral retribution. In the pursuit of his amours, he met with an artful unprincipled woman, named Delilah. He took her for his mistress. That she was already a common Philistine courtesan, seems probable from the narrative, and is asserted by Josephus. To such a downfall of sacred character had this man who had been consecrated to God from the womb, and even before he came into the womb, now reduced himself. He began with breaking the national law, which forbade a Philistine wife, and now ended with breaking the moral law, which forbade, with double force of prohibition, a Philistine mistress. And God made use of this inexcusable downfall to sink him to the bottom of his degradation, and bring upon him the full penalty of his sins. With the mercenary disposition of her class, she sold herself to the Philistine lords, with whom she arranged the plan of his capture, at the very time that she was intoxicating and blinding him with the blandishments of false love. In her lap he lay like a lamb, reposing his giant strength, unconscious of the knife which was already approaching his throat. Thrice she teased him with her importunity, while she tried to win and open his heart with her caresses, and extract from him the information as to where the secret of his strength lay. Thrice he put her off with a feigned answer; and, as if to make him inexcusable for folly, thrice she acted on that answer, and openly disclosed her treachery. O the gross infatuation of sin! how does it blind the eye of the understanding, and bind the soul with its irresistible fascination! Samson was not even now alarmed. On the contrary, her continual fondling began to have its fatal effect, and brought on that childish credulity and thoughtless lethargy, through which he was unable to resist her further importunity, and to retain sufficient firmness of heart to withhold the fatal secret. Vexed as he had been to death with her importunity, which grew more pressing as he grew weaker, he became desirous to relieve himself at any cost, from a situation which grew daily more painful, in proportion also to the growth of his self-indulgence, as well as of her power over him. In a fit of such reckless despair he let slip the fatal irrevocable secret, and in that instant was ruined. No sooner did Delilah know that the secret of his strength lay in his hair, than she made arrangements with the Philistine lords for his immediate capture; and, having lulled him to sleep in her lap, had the seven fatal locks shorn from his head. Then departed from him even the last outward token of his solemn covenant with God. He had long parted with its inward spirit. And God Himself utterly departed from him, taking away with Him the gift of supernatural strength. When all had been accomplished, the faithless woman awoke him, and never did man awake to so miserable a surprise. The Philistines were upon him, and he found himself weak as other men. He was easily overmastered, and, in order to secure themselves against the violence of a fit of returning strength, they put out his eyes, then brought him down to their capital city Gaza, and, having thrown him into the common prison there, bound him with fetters of brass, and set him to the servile and degrading task of grinding at the mill.

Deep indeed was the fall, lower than into the very grave. The man of God had become

the sport of his sinful enemies, both in body and in spirit. Israel's champion was a blind captive, her judge an ill-used slave. But God, in His mercy towards the servant whom He had chosen, gave him a resurrection from it, and set all His instruments of repentance to work. The blindness of Samson compelling his attention from outward things into the inmost recesses of his heart, his helpless condition, so miserably new to him, urging him to be reconciled unto God, the jeers and scoffs of his oppressors daily reminding him of former and better times, and of abuse of excellent gifts; their blasphemies of his God painfully announcing to him his own desertion of Him, and showing him how He had put him to an open shame among them, and his fetters at every motion accusing him of his past sins, and reckless loss of gifts and grace; these, and many other afflictions, bodily and spiritual, had now room for full and undisturbed exercise; and the narrowness of the prison of his body was enlarged to free and open space for his spirit. His repentance worked effectually,—his faith was restored; and, by a privilege seldom accorded to the penitent, he received back again the peculiar gift which he had abused. With the growth of his hair he felt the return of his supernatural strength.

Unbounded was the triumph of the Philistines in having subdued the terrible champion, and taken captive the judge of Israel. A day of national festival was appointed, and a pompous sacrifice of thanksgiving was offered by the lords to Dagon their god. Samson was brought forth and shown to the people, who raised a shout of boastful praise in honour of their god, who had delivered him into their hands. As usual, the sacrifice was followed by a splendid banquet; and when they were at the height of their wine and merriment, they called for Samson to be produced, that he might make them sport. This would consist of exhibitions of his strength, which might have been specially reserved for the occasion, by suffering his hair to grow, since his blindness seemed a security from its mischief; and it might include many cruel and insulting tricks played off upon the joint effect of his blindness and strength. Without doubt, they also enjoyed that thrilling feeling and excited curiosity,—that mingled emotion, half of terror, half of joy, which the child entertains, when he sees in his cage some rare and famous wild-beast. How little did they dream of the sudden and disastrous change which the scene was going to take! it seemed all security. On one side appeared the fallen judge of Israel, the fettered champion clad in his jail-dress, blind and weary with the toil of amusing them. But there appeared not to their eyes the uprisen spirit, the renewed heart, and the other tokens of the recovery of the sacred character of a restored man of God, trusting in God, and heedless of aught that his enemies could do. Impatient, perhaps, for further amusement, they beheld him leaning, in apparent exhaustion, against the two middle pillars which supported the surrounding roofs, and to which, under God's suggestion, he had ordered the boy that led him to direct him. It was the silence before the fire pours forth from the battery,—the calmness before the desolating hurricane,—the stillness before the earthquake. On the other side were seen the lords and chiefs of the Philistines with their families, to the number of three thousand persons, who were crowded together upon the flat roof, full of triumph and exultation,—full of merriment from the refreshment of meat and drink, such as the flood found the contemporaries of Noah,—such as Cyrus found the citizens of Babylon,—such as the Lord, at His coming, will find the children of the world. How little, indeed, did they dream, that in the twinkling of an eye, the joyous spectacle, on the stage before them, would give way for one of the next world, and that they would never witness another assemblage of men until they should stand in the crowd before the judgment-seat!

Samson, having felt the pillars, immediately set himself to the execution of the plan which he had, probably, in his mind when he had bidden the boy to direct him to them. Having put up a prayer for the requisite strength from God, and embraced the pillars with the firm grasp of devotion to certain death, one with each arm, he bowed himself with all his might. The dreadful preparation was too short, and, perhaps, in too crowded a space, to attract the unusually careless notice of such spectators, and, to their horror and amazement, all at once the roof fell with a crash, and lords and people were buried in the ruins. The whole flower of the Philistine nation, generals, counsellors, with wives and children, was thus cut off at one blow, and Samson inflicted upon them a more terrible loss by his death, than they had ever suffered during his life. And thus he, who had judged Israel for twenty years, proved to be the executioner of the enemies of Israel, who had little dreamed of the part which he was so publicly and awfully to act among them, and to turn the stage of their revelry into the scaffold of their judgment. He that was so fond of the saying, that from the sublime to the ridiculous is but

a step, might have added, that from triumph to mourning is a shorter still, and in more startling contrast. In both changes God derides the pride and mocks at the power of sinful man, whom He compels himself to furnish both stage and fool, both scaffold and culprit.

Eli

BY REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, M.A.

"The child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli," etc.—1 Samuel iii. 1.

It is impossible to read this chapter without perceiving that it draws a marked contrast between the two persons of whom it speaks—Eli and Samuel.

1. They are contrasted in point of years: for the one is a boy, the other a gray-headed old man; and if it were for only this, the chapter would be one of deep interest. For it is interesting always to see a friendship between the old and the young. It is striking to see the aged one retaining so much of freshness and simplicity as not to repel the sympathies of boyhood. It is surprising to see the younger one so advanced and thoughtful, as not to find dull the society of one who has outlived excitability and passion. This is the picture presented in this chapter.

2. They are contrasted again in point of office. Both are judges of Israel. But Eli is a judge rendering up his trust, and closing his public career. Samuel is a judge entering upon his office: and the outgoing ruler Eli is placed under very novel and painful circumstances in reference to his successor. He receives God's sentence of doom from the lips of the child he has taught and the friend he has loved. The venerable judge of forty years is sentenced by the judge elect.

3. Still more striking is the contrast in point of character. A difference of character we expect when ages are so different. But here the difference of inferiority is on the wrong side. It is the young who is counselling, supporting, admonishing the old. It is not the ivy clinging for its own sake to the immovable wall, to be held up; but it is the badly built, mouldering wall held together by the ivy, and only by the ivy kept from falling piecemeal into ruin.

4. Once more, we have here the contrast between a judge by office and a judge by Divine call. In the first days of the judges of Israel we find them raised up separately by God, one by one, one for each emergency. So that if war threatened the coasts of Israel, no man knew whence the help would come, or who would be Israel's deliverer. It always did come: there was always one qualified by God, found ready for the day of need, equal to the need; one whose fitness to be a leader no one had before suspected. But when he did appear, he proved himself to be Israel's acknowledged greatest,—greatest by the qualities he displayed, qualities given unto him by God. Therefore men rightly said he was a judge raised up by God. But it seems that in later days judges were appointed by hereditary succession. The judge's son became judge at his father's death; or the office devolved on the high-priest. This was Eli's qualification, it would seem. Eli was high-priest, and therefore he was judge. He appears not to have had a single ruling quality. He was only a judge because he was born to the dignity.

There is an earthly wisdom in such an arrangement,—nay, such an arrangement is indispensable. It is wise after an earthly sort to have an appointed succession. Hereditary judges, hereditary nobles, hereditary sovereigns: without them, human life would run into inextricable confusion. Nevertheless, such earthly arrangements only represent the Heavenly order. The Divine order of government is the rule of the Wise and Good. The earthly arbitrary arrangement—hereditary succession, or any other—stands for this, representing it, more or less fulfils it, but never is it perfectly. And from time to time God sets aside and quashes the arbitrary arrangement, in order to declare that it is only a representation of the true and Divine one. From time to time, one who has qualifications direct from God is made, in Scripture, to stand side by side with one who has his qualifications only from office or earthly appointment; and then the contrast is marvellous indeed. Thus Saul, the king appointed by universal suffrage of the nation, is set aside for David, the man after God's own heart; and thus the Jews, the world's hereditary nobles, descended from the blood and stock of Abraham, are set aside for the true spiritual succession, the Christian Church,—inheritors by Divine right, not of Abraham's blood, but of Abraham's faith. And thus the hereditary high-priests in the

genuine line of Aaron, priests by lawful succession, representing priestly powers, are set aside at once, so soon as the real High-Priest of God, Jesus Christ, Whose priestly powers are real and personal, appears on earth.

And thus, by the side of Eli, the judge by office, stands Samuel, the judge by Divine call: qualified by wisdom, insight, will, resting on obedience, to guide and judge God's people Israel.

I. ELI'S CHARACTER HAS TWO SIDES; WE WILL TAKE THE BRIGHT SIDE FIRST.

1. The first point remarkable in him is the absence of envy. Eli furthers Samuel's advancement, and assists it to his own detriment. He perceives that God has called the child. He does not say in petulance, "Then, let this favoured child find out for himself all he has to do; I will leave him to himself." Eli meekly tells him to go back to his place, instructs him how he is to accept the revelation, and appropriate it: "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." He conducts his rival to the presence-chamber, which by himself he cannot find, and leaves him there with the King, to be invested with the order which has been stripped off himself.

Consider how difficult this conduct of Eli's was. Remember how difficult it is to be surpassed by a younger brother, and bear it with temper; how hard it is even to be set right, with meekness; to have our faults pointed out to us: especially by persons who in rank, age, or standing, are our inferiors. Recollect how in our experience of life, in all professions, merit is kept down, shaded by jealousies. Recollect how rare generous enthusiasm is, or even fairness; how men depreciate their rivals by coldness, or by sneering at those whom they dare not openly attack.

One soldier we have heard of who gave up the post of honour and the chance of high distinction to cover an early failure of another, and to give him a fresh chance of retrieving honour. He did what Eli did: assisted his rival to rise above him. But where is the man of trade who will throw in a rival's way the custom which he cannot use himself? Where is the professional man, secular or clerical, who will so speak of another of the same profession, while struggling with him in honourable rivalry, or so assist him, as to insure that the brightest lustre shall shine upon what he really is? Whoever will ponder these things will feel that Eli's was no common act.

2. Remark the absence of all priestly pretensions.

Eli might with ease have assumed the priestly tone. When Samuel came with his strange story, that he had heard a voice calling to him in the dark, Eli might have fixed upon him a clear, cold, unsympathizing eye, and said, "This is excitement,—mere enthusiasm. I am the appointed channel of God's communications, I am the priest. Hear the Church. Unordained, unanointed with priestly oil, a boy, a child, it is presumption for you to pretend to communications from Jehovah. A layman has no right to hear Voices; it is fanaticism." Eli might have done this; he would have only done what ordained men have done a thousand times when they have frowned irregular enthusiasm into dissent. And then Samuel would have become a mystic, or a self-relying enthusiast. For he could not have been made to think that the Voice was a delusion. *That* Voice no priest's frown could prevent his hearing. On the other hand, Eli might have given his own authoritative interpretation to Samuel, of that Word of God which he had heard. But suppose that interpretation had been wrong?

Eli did neither of these things. He sent Samuel to God. He taught him to inquire for himself. He did not tell him to reject as fanaticism the belief that an inner Voice was speaking to him, a boy; nor did he try to force his own interpretation on that Voice. His great care was to put Samuel in direct communication with God; to make him listen to God; nay, and that independently of him, Eli. Not to rule him; not to *direct* his feelings and belief; not to keep him in the leading-strings of spiritual childhood, but to teach him to walk alone.

Now this is God's real best work. Men do not think so. They like to be guided. They ask, what am I to think? and what am I to believe? and what am I to feel? Make it easy for me. Save me the trouble of reflecting and the anguish of inquiring. It is very easy to do this for them; but from what minds, and from what books, do we really gain most of that which we can really call our own? From those that are suggestive, from those that kindle life within us, and set us thinking, and call conscience into action,—not from those that exhaust a subject and seem to leave it threadbare, but from those that make us feel there is a vast deal more in that subject yet, and send us as Eli sent Samuel, into the dark Infinite to listen for ourselves.

3. There was in Eli a resolve to know the whole truth. "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me of all the things that He said unto thee." Eli asked in earnest to know the worst.

It would be a blessed thing to know what God thinks of us. But next best to this would be to see ourselves in the light in which we appear to others: other men's opinion is a mirror in which we learn to see ourselves. It keeps us humble when bad and good alike are known to us. The worst slander has in it some truth from which we may learn a lesson which may make us wiser when the first smart is passed.

Therefore it is a blessing to have a friend like Samuel, who can dare to tell us truth, judicious, candid, wise; one to whom we can say, "Now tell me what I am, and what I seem; hide nothing, but tell me the worst." But, observe, we are not to beg praise or invite censure,—that were weak. We are not to ask for every malicious criticism or tormenting report,—that were hypochondria, ever suspecting, and ever self-tormenting; and to that diseased sensibility it would be no man's duty to minister. True friendship will not retail tormenting trifles; but what we want is one friend at least, who will extenuate nothing, but with discretion tell the worst, using unflinchingly the sharp knife which is to cut away the fault.

4. There was pious acquiescence in the declared Will of God. When Samuel had told every whit, Eli replied, "It is the Lord." The highest religion could say no more. What more can there be than surrender to the Will of God? In that one brave sentence you forget all Eli's vacillation. Free from envy, free from priestcraft, earnest, humbly submissive,—that is the bright side of Eli's character, and the side least known or thought of.

II. THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE TO ELI'S CHARACTER.

He was a wavering, feeble, powerless man, with excellent intentions, but an utter want of will; and if we look at it deeply, it is *will* that makes the difference between man and man; not knowledge, not opinions, not devoutness, not feeling, but will,—the power to be.

1. Let us look at the causes of this feebleness.

(1) A recluse life;—he lived in the temple. Praying and sacrificing, perhaps, were the substance of his life; all that unfitted him for the world; he knew nothing of life; he knew nothing of character. When Hannah came before him in an agony of prayer, he misjudged her. He mistook the tremulousness of her lip for the trembling of intoxication. He could not rule his own household; he could not rule the Church of God,—a shy, solitary, amiable ecclesiastic and recluse,—that was Eli.

And such are the really fatal men in the work of life, those who look out on human life from a cloister, or who know nothing of men except through books. Religious persons dread worldliness. They will not mix in politics. They keep aloof from life. Doubtless there is a danger in knowing too much of the world. But, beyond all comparison, of the two extremes the worst is knowing too little of life. A priesthood severed from human sympathies, separated from men, cut off from human affections, and then meddling fatally with questions of human life,—that is the Romish priesthood. And just as fatal when they come to meddle with public questions is the interference of men as good as Eli, as devout, and as incompetent, who have spent existence in a narrow religious party which they mistake for the World.

(2) That feebleness arose out of original temperament. Eli's feelings were all good: his acts were all wrong. In sentiment Eli might be always trusted: in action he was forever false, because he was a weak, vacillating man.

Therefore his virtues were all of a negative character. He was forgiving to his sons, because unable to feel strongly the viciousness of sin; free from jealousy, because he had no keen affections; submissive, because too indolent to feel rebellious. Before we praise a man for his excellences, we must be quite sure that they do not rise out of so many defects. No thanks to a proud man that he is not vain. No credit to a man without love that he is not jealous: he has not strength enough for passion.

All history overrates such men. Men like Eli ruin families by instability, produce revolutions, die well when only passive courage is wanted, and are reckoned martyrs. They live like children and die like heroes. Deeply true to nature, and exceedingly instructive, is this history of Eli. It is quite natural that such men should suffer well. For if only their minds are made up for them by inevitable circumstances, they can submit. When people come to Eli and say, "You should reprove your sons," he can do

it after a fashion; when it is said to him, "You must die," he can make up his mind to die: but this is not *taking* up the Cross.

2. Let us look at the result of such a character.

(1) It had no influence. Eli was despised by his own sons. He was not respected by the nation. One only of all he lived with kept cleaving to him till the last,—Samuel; but that was in a kind of mournful pity. The secret of influence is will,—not goodness; not badness,—both bad and good may have it. But will. And you cannot counterfeit will if you have it not. Men speak strongly and vehemently when most conscious of their own vacillation. They commit themselves to hasty resolutions, but the resolve is not kept; and so, with strong feelings and good feelings, they lose influence day by day.

(2) It manifested incorrigibility. Eli was twice warned; once by a prophet, once by Samuel. Both times he answered submissively. He used strong, nay, passionate expressions of penitence. Both times you would have thought an entire reformation and change of life was at hand. Both times he was warned in vain.

There are persons who go through life sinning and sorrowing,—sorrowing and sinning. No experience teaches them. Torrents of tears flow from their eyes. They are full of eloquent regrets. You cannot find it in your heart to condemn them, for their sorrow is so graceful and touching, so full of penitence and self-condemnation. But tears, heart-breaks, repentance, warnings, are all in vain. Where they did wrong once, they do wrong again. What are such persons to be in the next life? Where will the Elis of this world be? God only knows. But Christ has said, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

(3) It resulted in misery to others.

Recollect what this weakness caused. Those young men, Eli's sons, grew up to be their country's plague. They sapped the moral standard of their countrymen and countrywomen. They degraded the ministry. "Men abhorred the offering of the Lord." The armies of Israel, without faith in God, and without leadership of man, fled before the enemy. All that was Eli's doing. A weak man with good feelings makes more misery than a determined bad man. Under a tyranny men are at least at rest, for they know the worst. But when subjects or children know that by entreaty, or persistence, or intimidation, they can obtain what they want, then a family or a nation is cursed with restlessness. Better to live under bad laws which are firmly administered than under good ones where there is a misgiving whether they may not be changed. There is no wretchedness like the wretchedness caused by an undetermined will to those who serve under it.

ELI

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"There came a man of God unto Eli," etc.—1 Samuel ii. 27-30.

The temporal portion of the promise made to Abraham, and renewed to Isaac and Jacob, had now been long fulfilled. Their posterity was settled in the promised land. They were no longer sojourners and dwellers in tents, but had long had cities and towns divided amongst them. The 430 years of captivity and oppression, had been succeeded by nearly as many of independence, if we except some partial interruptions caused by the sins of the people, who no less politically than religiously had neglected the express commands of God. At this period we find Eli, at the head of both Church and state, as being both High Priest, and supreme judge of Israel. Brief as are the notices of him in Scripture, quite enough is told to form a lesson both fearful and instructive to parents and to children. The High Priesthood which had gone in the eldest branch of the house of Aaron, and had been solemnly confirmed to Phinehas, for his zeal for God's honour, had by some misconduct of his descendants, been taken away and conferred upon Eli, who was of the younger branch, that of Ithamar. Eli was therefore bound in a still more especial manner than any of his predecessors to maintain with all zeal and vigilance the cause of his Heavenly Master. But although a man of eminent piety, he suffered, in his latter days, both indolence and irresolution to overcome his earnest desire for the welfare and purity of God's Church; and he paid the forfeit with his life and the degradation of his family.

He had two sons. One was named Hophni, the other was the unworthy bearer of the glorious name of Phinehas. Being born in a high sovereign station they were exposed to all the tempters and temptations which beset princes, and too often render them the corruptors rather than the guardians of public morals. And they verified to a lamentable accuracy the observation which every reader of history must have made, how commonly exemplary fathers are succeeded by unworthy sons. Without doubt the unexpected contrast of character causes such instances to be more noticed, and makes them appear comparatively more numerous than they are. But still many moral causes contribute to the prevalence of such instances. The sons have not undergone the hardy discipline of the father. On the contrary the greatness of the father necessarily surrounds the son with flatterers and corruptors, and in greater number and more dangerous in proportion to his greatness. The public duties and station of the father do not allow that frequent and near oversight of his children, which is in the power of private persons, and yet at the same time it is more requisite. We cannot on these grounds be surprised that Eli, and Samuel, and David were afflicted with degenerate sons. But even in private life, the badness of the sons of good men has been often remarked. Nor ought we to wonder at it. The very order and discipline of a holy home, methodical and unrelaxed as it is and should be, assimilates so much the daily conversation of its inmates, that it leaves them ignorant of dispositions, which are latent but not suppressed, and the secret spark bursts into flame upon the first contact with the fiery trial of the world. Then the very strictness with which they have been brought up at home, makes them give a freer rein to their passions. Besides that the wound to their conscience having been more severe than to other sinners, their fall is more astounding and bewildering. They are filled with the recklessness of despair. A deep sense of shame of appearing before God, an acute sense of His aversion, drives them to a greater distance still from His presence. Even in their childhood, if they mix with others, they are subject to continual ridicule on every point connected with the holiness of the office or character of their parent, and, if not endued with more than common strength of character, are driven to study a contrast in order to rid themselves of a persecution which the joyous age of boyhood can ill brook or bear. It is delightful, however, to find how frequently the victory of the world over their unsuspecting innocence has been but temporary. The defeat has been given by surprise, and not in a pitched battle. The vanquished has not therefore lost heart and courage, nor has the vanquisher been able to carry from him all his godly ammunition. The mischievous birds may have rooted up some of the seeds sown in his heart, but they have rooted up together with them the cankered worm, and the harvest is abundant from the damage.

Thus possibly the very holiness of Eli, no less than his exalted station, was the cause of the sad contrast of the lives of his sons. The world in its most powerful shapes of temptation was at hand every moment to pluck out his words from their hearts, and sear their consciences with wilful sin against light, and truth, and knowledge. They exhibited a sad and scandalous example in the face of all Israel. Even their holy office of priesthood they converted into a ministry to their corrupt appetites. In exacting their portion of the offerings at sacrifice, they did it with a greedy and iniquitous extortion, such that men forsook the temple, and desisted from sacrifice. They loathed and abhorred a rite so profaned, nor could they think that the Lord would accept any thing from such unworthy and polluted hands. But they went yet farther. It was the custom for the women to assemble at the door of the tabernacle, and there wait upon God with prayer. These, whom it was their duty to instruct, and help, and encourage in their spirit of holy devotion, they debauched; and thus God's house became as an idolatrous temple of the heathen, where the most infamous prostitution was customary, and His priests as their priests. The scandal which such conduct created in Israel can scarcely be expressed. The good mourned and grieved and kept themselves in sorrow away from a place where such impieties met their eyes, and which they may well expect every moment to fall and crush its polluters. The bad rejoiced that the service of their God was now as agreeable and easy as that of any heathen god, whose lustful rites they had most longed after; or were glad of the excuse for abandoning altogether the worship of the Lord God. Considering how the idolator was still in the land, with his corrupt worship and all its horrible abominations, ready to insinuate itself through the smallest opening left by the negligence of God's ministers, what must have been the disastrous effects now, when the flood-gates were thrown wide open to the full tide of ungodliness. Eli was at this time in extreme old age, and probably his sons were his chief channel of

intercourse with the people. He may, therefore, be excused for not having immediately interfered. They would take good care to block up every avenue to him of information of their doings. At last, he did hear what his sons had done unto all Israel. But did he put on the stern authority of the father; did he as High Priest rebuke and degrade them in the name of the Lord; did he as supreme ruler of the people avenge the violence of which they had been guilty? Far from it. He sent for them and said, "Why do ye such things? For I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him, but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?" How languid is this chiding, how miserably weak and defective this expostulation, how does it betray his duty, as civil and religious sovereign! Of course, they disregarded it, and went on in their infatuation of wickedness. He should have executed judgment on the Lord's behalf, and not insinuated to them the Lord's judgment upon them. He forgot the honour of God, and sacrificed the love of God to the love of his children. How apt are parents to identify these two loves, even when they are most opposed. It is true that a just and real love for others can never be inconsistent with the love of God, for it is included under it, as the less under the greater: it is spiritual, and therefore looks on them as immortal spirits, regards their eternal welfare, places them with themselves in the invisible world before God, and dreads an everlasting separation. To ensure this eternal union of love it will risk any chance of temporary hatred here. But for this pure and heavenly love is too often substituted a base counterfeit, a spurious earthly love, a mere worldly, yea animal fondness. This looks but to worldly welfare: this is slow to rebuke for fear of an earthly separation: dreads giving pain lest itself be pained: shrinks from duty lest duty seem unlovely. It is the slavish love mixed with fear. Perfect love towards man, as being a part of perfect love towards God, casteth out fear. It is the exercise upon those whom we do see of that affection which we bear towards Him Whom we do not see: and the true son of God thanks God for every opportunity of doing unto others for His sake what He has done for him. But how especially does the exhibition of such love become the ministers of God, whose public profession is an intelligent and faithful service to Him. Other men attract little notice by inordinate love towards their own, and little therefore can they disparage God before man. But His minister, looked up to for a pattern of faithful stewardship to his Master, cannot but bring either his own fidelity or God's glory into question. When they are seen bearing with such as are openly acting contrary to the interests of God's service, who are pulling down as fast as they build up, what shall men think? Surely either lightly of their fidelity, or of the importance of God's service.

But there were perhaps other and more excusable reasons for this slackness in his duty on the part of Eli. It is probable that his sons had gradually gained the dominion over his age which so much stood in need of their help, and had even insensibly usurped his power as judge. Except by a bold and vigorous exertion, which was beyond the effort of the sluggishness of his time of life, he could not reinstate himself. Their impetuous and overbearing temper quite overawed the timid old man. Yet a zeal for God's insulted honour should have roused him, and had he sought only His glory, he would not have feared any thing which men could do. He would have asserted it by word and deed in the face of the congregation.

A very different rebuke from that with which Eli met his sons was now given by God to him. A Prophet was sent to announce the displeasure of God, and pronounce judgment upon him and his posterity for his indifference to God's honour. A sad train of calamities is foretold. The loss of the ark itself, the ruin of his family, its deprivation of the priesthood, its degradation into the ranks of the lowest poverty, and, as a sign and token of these, the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas in one day, are declared. In those days God openly revealed His counsels. And these things are written for our learning, that we may be assured how God deals with our sins, although He may not express His displeasure. Our tree may be green and flourishing—many may admire and enjoy its shade and shelter, but God's mark and number has been put upon it, and like Eli's it has been destined to the axe. Let, above all, the minister of God take warning from this awful message, how he bears with the sin of his children, and allows them to remain a scandal and stumbling-block to his neighbours. His line, like Eli's may cease to produce faithful and spiritual priests unto God. Its stream has been corrupted at its source. Has it never happened that several generations of profligates

could be traced up to some eminent preacher of the Word? Let him make himself present in his imagination to so dreadful a futurity. Let him see himself placed at the head of a file which ends in some notorious infidel, whose works are undoing much more than his have done or may be doing. Let him behold posterity gazing in amazement and sorrow at such a genealogy age after age, and all the good and wise lamenting the dishonour done to God, and injury to a man by the writings of his descendant. Could a judgment more terrible fall upon a good man? Eli's conduct led morally no less than judicially to the spiritual overthrow of his house. And so will his. The example of such characters as Eli is the more instructive, as in their life-time it is less remarked. The world sympathises with their human but unspiritualized affections. They are also endowed with bright and shining qualities which throw a splendour of holiness around them, and dazzle to their defects: while those qualities are active, but the defects passive. It is not until these last have produced some bitter fruit in their children or among posterity, that they are noted, and then become in the page of history, as Eli's are, a prominent feature. The man of his own days and the man of posterity thus appears sometimes quite in two different characters.

His successor in his judicial character was at that moment in the tabernacle, waiting upon him. Samuel, the son of Elkanah, a Levite, had been presented and dedicated to the Lord by his mother Hannah, according to vow. As soon as he was weaned she took him up to Shiloh (where the tabernacle had been ever since the days of Joshua), and there left him, to be brought up in ministry unto the Lord before Eli. The boy grew up in wisdom and stature, and in favour both with God and men. In him Eli must have seen a glaring contrast to his profligate sons. His holy innocence, his watchful dutifulness, the grace, and purity, and truth, which came from his lips, must have sorely reminded him of all the opposite qualities which were exhibited by his reprobate sons, and bowed his heart in prostrate humiliation before the Lord. Great, however, must have been the comfort of such an attendant on the solitude of the old man, and beautiful is this conjunction of childhood and old age, of yet untainted innocence and godliness, with sincere and broken-hearted repentance. Through this child, Eli received a second message from the Lord. He was in attendance upon Eli. The old man had lain down, the lamp of God was just burning out, and Samuel had also laid himself down, when the Lord called "Samuel." The boy, not knowing the word of the Lord, nor having had it yet revealed to him, thought that Eli had called him, and went to him; and thus he was called, and went three times. On the third call, however, Eli plainly perceived that the Lord had called the child, and gave him directions for answering Him. In the morning Samuel feared to tell Eli the message of the Lord, so full of denunciation was it against his house. Eli, however, commanded him to tell forth his communication. It confirmed that of the Prophet, and added to it the threat of an event close at hand, which God would bring to pass in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heard it should tingle. Eli accepted from the boy with pious humiliation and unfeigned resignation this stern irrevocable sentence of God. "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good," he exclaimed. He had God's honour and glory at heart, although he wanted the resolute activity to maintain it. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," was his earnest prayer, although not his practice. The main defect in his character was passiveness, and this, while it prevented him from asserting the cause of God as he ought, yet inclined him to utter and holy submission to his judgments. He patiently acquiesced in his punishment, acknowledged its justice, and freely confessed his own unworthiness and sins of omission. God's sentence was quickly put into execution. The Philistines, the most formidable enemy of Israel, were again in the field. Israel met them, and was sorely defeated. How far the corruption of the sons of Eli had spread appears from what followed. As soon as the army had returned to the camp, the Elders convoked a council, and in this they came to the infatuated resolution of carrying the ark of God into the field. Their folly and impiety would force God to defend His own dwelling-place. They treated Him exactly in the same superstitious and unceremonious way as the heathen did their gods. They would compel His will to their devices. They would make a charm of His ark. But they were not singular. Thus has God been treated by His own people in all ages. They have claimed His aid and authority in the most iniquitous enterprises. They have put Him, as far as in them lay, in the midst of their host, carried Him into the fight, and on shoulders as hateful to Him as those of Hophni and Phinehas. He has been proclaimed as the abetting and patron Deity on occasions which His soul abhorred: men have sung "Te Deum" at

the close of a horrible massacre, and howled His holy name, and boasted His presence among them, amid deeds at which humanity shudders.

Eli did not dispute the authority of the council when they came for the ark. Probably, although both High Priest and judge, his prerogative did not extend so far as to put a negative on the decree of such an assembly. But we can hardly suppose him not to have remonstrated with the insane wickedness of such a proposal, and especially with his sons. They, however, and all the rest by their example, had long, in the unbridled strength of presumption, domineered over the feebleness of his old age, and scorned his advice, and disregarded his authority. So God gave them all up to a reprobate mind, so that seeing they should not see, and hearing they should not understand. He left them to their own devices, by them to work out His judgments upon themselves. Considering, however, the dimness of Eli's sight, they might have taken away the ark before he was aware, and it had become too late to interfere either with advice or authority.

The ark, therefore, was taken into the camp, and surely it must have been a sight to inflame into a madness of enthusiasm the minds of the soldiers. Borne amid a long and solemn procession of priests, the pillar of glory resting upon it, and shining from afar, this symbol of the covenant and the presence of their almighty and irresistible Chief, of Jehovah mighty in battle, their victorious leader for 400 years, advanced into the camp. The whole host immediately raised a shout, so that the earth rang again. Proportional was the depression of the spirit of the Philistines. The ark had never come into the field since the miraculous capture of Jericho, whose walls fell down at its presence. The effect, however, was in the result exactly opposite to what Israel hoped. The Philistines were driven to the madness of despair. So animated on each side the armies met. The Israelites were defeated with the terrible slaughter of thirty thousand men, the ark was taken, and the two sons of Eli were among the slain. God's ways were not their ways. He would not go forth with their hosts. His ark proved to them an empty chest, whose treasure was gone. And He inflicted on them the sin and shame of minishing His glory, and making His name a by-word among the heathen.

Meanwhile Eli remained at Shiloh, trembling for the fate of the ark of God. The godly man felt and knew but too well the extent of the daring presumption with which they had provoked Him. Never had He been so tempted of Israel since the days of the wilderness. And as they had fallen there, so may they fall now. He was sitting down, anxiously on the watch, by the way-side, when he heard a great cry in the city. A runaway had brought to Shiloh the dreadful news of the event of the battle. He immediately appeared before Eli with his clothes rent and dust upon his head. He told him of the loss of the battle, and of the death of his two sons, and thus far Eli heard him with patience. For all that he was prepared. But when he added to this the loss of the ark of God, quite overcome he fell back, and breaking his neck (for he was heavy and old) expired.

Doubtless he had been revolving in his mind, the desperate state into which his own weakness and irresolution had brought Israel. His uncorrected sons had spread their corruption far and wide, and rash and godless counsels had prevailed. The thought of the loss of the ark must have occurred to him, and although instantly rejected as something too dreadful for possibility, would recur again and again, and reproach him as the author of so unspeakable a calamity. What an accumulation then of self-accusation must have come upon him at the moment when the reality was announced, and felled him as by a blow, to the ground. The ark of God was gone from Israel. The visible presence of God had departed from Israel. The Church of God was removed from Israel: yea, from the whole earth. Where was now the covenant with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses? Where was now the promised Redeemer? The golden link of redemption was broken short asunder. God in anger had deserted His people, and for their sins annulled His covenant with His people. Why should He not? It was as conditional as that made to Phinehas, by the annulling of which he himself was now High Priest. Israel was no longer a people of God. He was forsaken by God, and the triumphant idolater was wagging his head in mockery, and asking him, "Where is now thy God?" Of all this inexpressible ruin, spiritual and temporal, to Israel and to the world, he himself was author. He the supreme ruler under God, had winked at unruly godlessness. He the minister of holiness had borne with unholiness. He the guardian of God's honour on earth, had brought it into ridicule before the Gentiles. He the High Priest of God had destroyed the Church of God. The agony of such thoughts, momentary though it was, could not be borne by human heart. It choked him, and he fell. He died at the advanced age of ninety-eight.

There remains an appendage to the account of Eli, an anecdote of striking beauty, brief as it is. The wife of Phinehas, who was close on the time of her labour, when she heard the dreadful news was suddenly seized with the pangs of childbirth. She lived just long enough to give the child the melancholy name of Ichabod, or, Where-is-the-glory, alluding to the glory of God having departed by the capture of the ark. She too, like her father-in-law, recked little of other loss compared with this. A husband and a brother slain, and a father dead, and all the destitution hence arising, were as dust in the balance when weighed with this. Is the Church of God equally precious now? Will men think temporal losses as nothing compared with this? Will loss of father, and brother, and house, and home, be considered quite subordinate to the overwhelming magnitude of this? And now too, when that Church no longer feeds us with scanty food and coarse fare, no longer amuses us with distant shadows, typified hopes, a promised Redeemer, but when it fills us, beyond the most lively imagination of craving want, with sumptuous unfailing spiritual feasts, and makes us to feel living realities, hopes in substance, a Redeemer given. How many Christians can be thus compared with these Jews? It is to be hoped many, however public carelessness and infidelity may seem to deny the fact. In a wicked and adulterous generation such persons appear not in the foreground: they come not into view until room has been made for them by the conflict and thrusting of the wicked, which involve in their iniquitous contests for wealth and power, the welfare of the visible Church of God, and carry His ark into their battle.

The history of Eli has ever been held out as a tremendous warning to indulgent parents, and headstrong children. It denounces sorrow, and shame, and ruin both on one and the other, and above all it shows how the glory of the presence of God may depart from a family, and their temporal ruin be but the humble companion to their spiritual. A pious godly father may, like Eli, forget that he is set in a watch-tower over his house, to espy and eject in time every unmeet intruder. He may overlook or but slightly rebuke, through too fond indulgence, the outbursts of passion which proclaim that a wolf has entered into the fold, that one sheep at least has been bitten, and call urgently upon him to lose not a moment in expelling the enemy. He may become, like Eli, the subject and not the ruler of his children: and then the fate of Eli's house will be the fate of his. He will hear Christ and His holy company crying aloud, amid his chambers, "Let us depart hence," he will see that departure, and expire in grief and shame: the last penitent survivor of his house shall exclaim, "where is the glory," and die broken-hearted in the speech; and the pitiless unbelieving world around, freed from the reproof of their former godliness, shall clap their hands and exclaim, "where is now their God?"

And is no warning conveyed to rulers and governors, to whose hands Christ, the great Apostle, has committed the charge of His people? May not their indifference to the moral and spiritual state of subjects which He hath entrusted to them as children to a father, bring down ruin on themselves and the whole nation, and extinguish the light of the Gospel, the presence of Christ's Church among them?

Eli and His Sons

BY REV. H. P. LIDDON, D.D.

"Because his sons made themselves vile," etc.—1 Samuel iii. 13.

This is the reason assigned by God, through the mouth of Samuel, for the heavy punishment which was to visit the family of Eli. Eli, the high-priest of Israel, was descended, as you will remember, from Ithamar, the younger of the sons of Aaron; how the younger line of Ithamar came to be substituted for the elder line of Eleazar, we do not know. Eli would seem to have succeeded Abishai of the elder line of Eleazar, and there must have been some occurrence involving failure on the part of Eleazar's descendants, and special favour towards the descendants of Ithamar, to account for an arrangement which violated the hereditary law which governed the transmission of the priesthood. As it was, Abishai's descendants lived on as private persons in Israel until the days of Zadok, who succeeded to the high-priesthood when Abiathar, the last of the high-priests of the line of Ithamar, was deposed by Solomon for his share in the rebellion of Adonijah. Eli, then, was the first high-priest of the family of Ithamar, and Eli was

not only high-priest, he was judge of Israel as well, thus uniting in his person the functions of a chief, ecclesiastical ruler, and temporal sovereign. His position is one, at least in the early days of Israel, quite unique; nothing nearly resembling it occurs again before the days of the Maccabees. Eli passed his life for the most part at Shiloh, the ancient sanctuary, situated in one of the most secluded valleys of the tribe of Ephraim. Shiloh, as the name implies, was a place of rest; there Israel rested after his long wanderings in the desert, after his fierce struggle for the possession of Canaan; there the ark rested after the conquest of the country, when it was brought from Gilgal; there it rested from the closing days of Joshua to the early years of Samuel; there, as every devout Israelite believed, the Lord Jehovah rested in an especial mode and presence, as was implied by the prayer: "Hear, Thou that sittest between the Cherubim"—meaning those which overshadowed the ark; there, as from the seat of judgment, Joshua finally divided Western Palestine among the tribes; there, from father to son in steady succession, the descendants of Aaron in the line of Eleazar had exercised their priesthood; and there was now installed Eli of Ithamar's line, Eli with his sons and his dependents, living in a scene already rich with sacred associations, with inspiring and illustrious memories. It was at Shiloh that Eli spent his years tranquilly, and busy, and in the main honourable, years they were. Busy undoubtedly they were, since he had in his hands the civil as well as the religious administration of the country. With what gracious dignity he ordinarily discharged the duties of his high office, we know from the visits which were paid by Hannah to Shiloh, both before and after the birth of Samuel. Well fitted truly was Shiloh to be the seat of an ecclesiastical ruler, lying as it did on the main road, which ran through the country from north to south, lying among hills which fairly shut it in on every side but one; three sides terraced with vines, olives, and fig-trees, while in the plain below, on a slight eminence levelled by the hand of man, stood the tabernacle, containing the most precious things in Israel, and surrounded by the priests and Levites and others concerned in the civil and religious government of the country. Shiloh was never a capital, as was Jerusalem, as was Samaria, as was even Shechem. During the greater part of the year it was as quiet as any small country cathedral town in England; only when at the great yearly festivals, devout Israelites crowded from every tribe to their central national sanctuary, was its seclusion invaded. Well might it have seemed an ideal home of prayer and study, and mild authority and ripe wisdom, where piety and integrity and purity and philanthropy might be trained to high perfection for the common good. Yet Shiloh was the scene of the base avarice, the high handed violence, and the vulgar profligacy of the sons of Eli, and Shiloh was the scene of Eli's weakness, so culpable in itself, so fraught with ruin in its consequences to his family and to his home, when "his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not."

Eli, let us observe, was otherwise and personally a good man. His character underwent searching tests at the most critical period of his life, and it is clear that he was resigned, humble, and in a true sense devout; Eli's resignation to the will of God was conspicuous on the very trying occasion of the announcement of his punishment for the great failing which will presently be noticed. He was told that his family would be replaced by the rival house; that his sons would die both of them on a single day; that those members of his race who were not cut off in their youth would be in a worse position than those who were, since they would have to beg their bread of their rivals; that none of his descendants would attain to old age; that neither bloody nor unbloody sacrifices whereby the ordinary sins both of the priests and people were purged under the ancient law, would avail to cancel the sins of his family. If Eli had been the successor of a long line of rulers of the religion of Israel, submission would have been easier. "You can fall with dignity," it has been said, "when you have behind you a great history." It was easier for Louis XVI. to mount the scaffold, than for Napoleon to embark for St. Helena. Eli had succeeded to a position to which his family could never have expected to succeed in the ordinary course of things. He hoped, no doubt, that his sons would secure to his family the dignity of the priesthood for all coming time, at least for many a generation to come; he hoped he was to be the first of a long line of priests of the house of Ithamar. The disappointment of a hope like this is much more than any but a good man can experience without repining, and Eli, had he been other than a good man might have argued that the severity of the sentence meted out to him was out of proportion to his personal fault.

His fault, after all, was not positive but negative; he had only done less than he ought

to have done; he had sinned out of good nature, out of an easy temper, but could he have been chastised more severely had he himself sinned viciously and out of *malice prepense*? This is what many a man would have said in Eli's position; but Eli is too certain that he is in the hands of One Who is all just, as well as all powerful, to attempt or to think of complaint or remonstrance. When an unknown prophet first announced to him his sentence he was silent; when the boy Samuel repeated the sentence he uttered words which, next after those in Gethsemane have given expression to religious resignation for all time, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." And Eli's personal goodness is also seen in his humility; he submits to be rebuked and sentenced by his inferior without a word of remonstrance. The nameless member of a prophetic order tells a man who is at the head of the religious as well as the civil State of Israel, that his conduct has been marked by ingratitude to God, and that the doom of degradation awaits his house. We know how rulers like Ahab and Manasseh treated prophets, however eminent, who told them unwelcome truths. Eli listens, he is silent; no violent word, much less any act of violence, escapes him, when thus confronted with what a less humble man would certainly have deemed gross impertinence, and the message of the nameless prophet is repeated by the boy Samuel, whose patron Eli was, and to whose parents he had been kind. Samuel was, as we know, even as a lad, favoured by Heavenly visions, but Samuel stood in much the same relation towards Eli, that a chorister in the cathedral might to the Archbishop of Canterbury, or, rather, to a person, if such there were, who should combine the office of Primate of the Church and of Prime Minister; and yet when Samuel tells Eli, in God's name, that God would do a thing in Israel at which "both the ears of everyone that heareth it shall tingle"—meaning the degradation and punishment of his patron's family, Eli is even eager to hear the very utmost that the boy has to say, for he is thinking not of the channel through which the message comes, but only of its substance, or its ground in truth—of its moral rather than its official authority. He has no petty sense of offended dignity that must vent its spleen on the messenger, when his conscience tells him that the message is only what he might expect to hear. This, I say, is true humility, the desire, the determination to see ourselves as we really are, to bear ourselves towards God and towards our fellow-men accordingly.

And, thirdly, Eli's personal piety is especially noticeable at the moment of his death. You remember the scene, one of the most emphatic in the Old Testament. The struggle to throw off the Philistine yoke had not yet ended; the Philistines, indeed, were making a supreme effort that it should end in the permanent subjection of Israel. They had come up in force out of their own plain on the Mediterranean shore; they were encamped in a strong position in the hills of the country at Aphek, near Mizpah; they had already inflicted a severe defeat on the Israelites, when the idea occurred to some of the soldiers in the beaten army that if only the ark of the covenant, the ark of the sacred Presence, could be brought from Shiloh to the camp of Israel, Israel's victory over the Philistines would be inevitable. There were obvious objections to such a use of the ark, but the danger was pressing. Eli weakly consented, and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, went forth, as guardians of the most precious thing in Israel, to the battlefield of Aphek. The Philistines, indeed, themselves were at first terrified. They knew the history of the passage of the Jordan, they knew the history of the conquest of Canaan; but in the event they inflicted a crushing defeat on Israel. Thirty thousand Israelites, and among them Hophni and Phinehas, were left dead upon the field, and the ark fell into the hands of the victorious pagans. Eli, bearing the weight of his ninety-eight years, sat trembling and expectant by the side of the road leading to the watch-tower of Shiloh. Eli, blind as he was, could not see the messenger who had suddenly appeared running up the narrow defile, and whose presence had created in all Shiloh a profound sensation. The messenger, however, approached, and told the old man that he had come from the battlefield, and Eli asked for news. Eli was a man who loved the country which he ruled, and he had to hear that Israel had fled before the Philistines, and that there had been a great slaughter of his people. He listened in silence. Eli was a father who loved his children tenderly, if with a mistaken affection, and he had to hear that his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas were dead. Still he listened on in silence. Eli was a priest with his heart in the right place, a man to whom the honour of God and the interests of religion meant more, incomparably more, than anything else in this world, more than the welfare of his family, more than the welfare of his country. He had to hear that the ark of God was taken. It was too much. It came to pass that when the messenger

"made mention of the ark of God, Eli fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died." This, I say, was an unpremeditated revelation of character. He might have survived the national disgrace; he might have survived the death of his children; but that the ark of the sacred Presence, of which he was the appointed guardian, should be taken, this he could not survive. It touched the Divine honour, and Eli's devotion is to be measured by the fact, that the shock of such a disaster killed him on the spot.

There is, then, no question as to Eli's personal excellence, but it was accompanied by a want of moral resolution and enterprise which explains the ruin of his house. He and it were ruined, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." The original words might perhaps be better rendered. "They brought curses on themselves." They are described as sons of Belial, or, in modern language, as thoroughly bad men. The law of Moses gave express instruction as to the share which the priest was to have of every peace offering, and Hophni and Phinehas insisted upon taking more than the law gave them, and in taking it in a way that defeated the requirements of the law. To this high-handed avarice they added habits of personal debauchery, and thus religion fell naturally into contempt. Men abhorred the offering of the Lord. Eli knew what was going on. He said to his sons: "I hear of your evil dealings from all this people; ye make the Lord's people to transgress." Eli was not indifferent, he was not silent; he spoke to his sons in words of even calculated severity; but then he only spoke, he did not act. The scandal went on. When the ark was sent to the camp, as we have seen, it was accompanied by Hophni and Phinehas, and every Israelite knew that if Hophni continued to hold his present position he would at no distant date sit in the seat of Aaron. Eli only talked to his sons, and we can understand how he may have persuaded himself that talking was enough; that instead of taking a very painful resolution it was better to leave matters alone. If he were to do more, was there not a risk that he might forfeit the little influence over the young men that still remained to him? Would not harsh treatment defeat its object by making them desperate? Might they not attribute the most judicial severity to mere personal annoyance? If, after speaking to them, he left them alone they would think over his words. Anyhow, they would soon be older, and as they grew older, they would, he may have hoped, grow more sensible; they would see the imprudence, the impropriety, as well as the graver aspects, of their conduct; they would anticipate the need of action on their father's part by such a reformation of their manners as would hush the murmurs and allay the discontent of Israel. And even if this could not be calculated on very seriously, something might occur to give a new turn to their occupations. In any case, it might be better to wait and see whether matters would not in some way right themselves. This is what weak people do. They escape, as they think, from the call of unwelcome duty, from the duty of unwelcome action, by stretching out the eyes of their mind towards some very vague future, charged with all sorts of airy improbabilities. They call it "the Chapter of Accidents"; they trust for relief from their present embarrassments to the chapter of accidents. My brethren, whatever appearances may say, there is no such chapter in the book either of man's natural history, or of his religious history. Every occurrence with a label of "accident" is in reality an act of the Divine providence, only it is an act for which we find it less easy to account than are His more ordinary acts. What seems to us the most fortuitous of accidents is the issue of the most deliberate Will that exists, guided by infinite wisdom, and infinite love, and if we, you and I, are consciously at issue with that wisdom and that love, we are playing desperate tricks with ourselves if we dream that anything can happen that will really relieve us. If Eli had not been blinded by his misplaced affection for his children, he would have known that outward circumstances do not improve those whose wills are already on a wrong moral tack, and that there is no truth whatever in the assumption that because we are getting older, we are therefore, somehow, necessarily getting better. Years may only bring with them a harder heart and a more blunted conscience. The experience of life may make men cynical even more easily than it may make them wise; and they who in youth have refused to hear Moses and the Prophets, are not in after-life likely to be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Nothing but an inward change, a change of will, and character, and purpose, could possibly have saved Hophni and Phinehas, and this change was, to say the least, more probable if they could have ceased to hold the offices which meant for them only every day they held them deepening guilt and ever accumulating profanation. There is a bitter epigram—bitter, but seemingly true—that more evil is

done in the world by weak men than by wicked men. Downright wickedness rouses opposition; something, others feel, must be done, if anything can be done, to put it down; but weakness saunters through the world arm-in-arm with some form of goodness, and men put up with its failures out of consideration to the good company that it keeps. Had it not been for the excellence of Eli's personal character, Israel would have risen in indignation to chase the young profaners of the sacred priesthood from the precincts of the sanctuary; but Eli's sons could not be treated as common criminals, and Eli failed to do for his God, for his religion, for his country, that which he only could do, if the law of God's just judgments was not to take effect. Eli's sin consisted precisely in this: he did not restrain his sons. He ought to have removed them, as he could have removed them, from the offices which they dishonoured. Instead of that he only talked to them. His sin certainly was a sin of omission; it did not debase his personal character, it did not make himself proud or rebellious, or even ungodly, but it involved the misery of his country, the discredit of the religion over which he presided, the dishonour of his God. "Thou honourest thy sons more than Me." That was how the nameless prophet, speaking in the name of the Lord, described to Eli himself Eli's sin. It was a sort of sin of which only an amiable man could be guilty; but, for all that, in its consequences it was fatal.

Hannah

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"The name of the one was Hannah," etc.—1 Samuel i. 2.

Hannah, the mother of Samuel, was the first wife of Elkanah, who was of the Levite house of Kohath, and lived at Ramah, in the portion of the tribe of Ephraim. But, like her great mother Sarah, she remained barren. Her husband imitated the example of Abraham, and took another wife, named Peninnah. From the affection and superior honour which she still received from Elkanah, this step had, no doubt, her concurrence, as Abraham's had Sarah's. And the result was the same. What other could be expected from human nature? Therefore, as Hagar despised Sarah, so did Peninnah, Hannah. With all the insult of a vulgar mind, she persecuted her superior without ceasing. But she had much more matter for her reproaches than Hagar had. In consequence of the splendid promise of God to Abraham, that He would multiply his seed as the stars of the Heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore, his descendants and inheritors of this promise looked upon barrenness as arguing not only a bodily defect, but also a moral deficiency. The woman was excluded from her share in a general promised blessing. What was this, they would reason, but to be subjected to a particular curse? Hence they employed the phrase, "the reproach of barrenness." Such being the prevailing opinion, we may conceive what a weapon such an occasion of reproach was in the hands of the unthinking and unfeeling. Peninnah was both. How bitter, therefore, must have been her revilings; how rancorous the venom of the asp in her lips, when, with her own numerous progeny around her, she mocked the solitary and childless Hannah; and how deep the despondency of Hannah. But the Lord had not abandoned her, according to her enemy's accusation. He supported and comforted her, and gave her husband grace to withstand the importunate claim to superiority which the fruitful wife was incessantly pleading to him. On a mind less devout, such a claim would have been very shortly established. But Elkanah continued firm, and ceased not to show her every mark of kindness and attention. He had that godly spirit, which, so far from considering another's misfortune as a judgment of God, looks upon it as an occasion of calling forth all his own gifts; there is a dearth (it says to him) which cries out to be relieved from his horn of abundant kindness: there is a drought which demands succour from his well of comfort. Child of Adam, as he is, he is too thankful for the present exemption from misfortune to pass judgment upon those who fall under the universal lot, to which he himself must, one day or another, be subjected. Nay, affliction is sacred in his eyes, for he knows that it is the most frequent channel of God's spiritual blessings. It is the hard, unexamined, impenitent heart, which considers it merely in the light of a withdrawal of temporal blessings, and, appreciating no other blessings, denounces it as a mark of God's wrath.

On one particular occasion, Hannah was doomed, every year, to undergo more than usual mortification from the more than usually excited malignity of her rival. When Elkanah offered sacrifice in the tabernacle at Shiloh, he divided those portions of the victim, which were reserved for eating at home, amongst his family. But while the rest received an equal, to Hannah he gave a double portion. This preference inflamed Peninnah's violent temper beyond all power of control. Unmindful of the sacred character of the meat, of the sober and solemn feeling which should accompany the participation of it, and should receive increase from it, she broke forth in a torrent of unrestrained abuse, which, however, Hannah, from the observance of what Peninnah had neglected, was more than usually able to sustain. The passover, which was the principal solemnity on which they would go up with their husband to Shiloh, would supply her with a topic of most painful reproach. She might address her in such taunting terms as these: "I am going up with my sons and my daughters, to appear before the Lord as a mother in Israel. Where are thy sons and daughters? Whom hast thou to ask, 'What service is this ye keep?' And to whom hast thou to answer, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover'? These instructions I have given my children year by year. And shalt thou have a double portion of the meat of a sacrifice in which thou hast no interest? Shall I, a mother of God's children, be thus set in honour below thee, whom, if all the mothers in Israel had resembled, this feast, which is an ordinance for us and our children for ever, had long ceased for want of celebrators? I have not made the Lord's promise of none effect. See how largely He hath fulfilled them unto me. Why He hath withheld them from thee, thou best knowest. Stay at home, and humble thyself for thy sins. I go up to thank the Lord. Why goest thou? I go up to bless the Lord. Why dost not thou curse Him, and die?" This was a severe trial for Hannah. The enemy of mankind never acts with greater effect than when he rouses a reviling spirit. He shoots two souls with the same arrow. He enjoys full possession of the heart of the reviler, and thence, as from an advantageous position, attacks another heart with the greatest effect. The wrath and indignation of the reviled is roused; fire is set to the inert magazine of his sinful passions; the spirit of Cain is provoked to come forth to the defence. Dreadful, indeed, is the sin of the reckless reviler. He is the most urgent of tempters, and most exactly performs the office of the fallen spirit, which first tempted. This species of temptation God has often chosen as the most severe wherewith to try His saints. The fire of the furnace is so intense, that no dross can maintain its union with the metal, and they must either be consumed, or come forth as pure gold. Hannah stood the test. She did not return railing for railing; she understood the nature of her position, and said to herself, "It is the Lord's doing. And, although I am not conscious of being so bad as my reviler represents, let me examine my heart, and see that I have not the disposition to the evil with which I am charged; and if I find that I have, let me humbly and heartily thank God for having thus discovered it to me, and regard, with charity, her whom He has made to me an instrument of so much good." Such is the spirit in which a saint meets the reviler. The heart may, indeed, be pierced, but that wound, which in others is a breach to admit the devil into the fortress, is to him a door through which to admit an Angel of light into his dwelling.

Year after year was Hannah thus tried, and year after year her heart was mollified and humbled, her self-knowledge was increased, and she became more and more adapted to become the mother of a son, who should be a light in Israel. At length the days of her trial were accomplished, and her enduring patience was rewarded. As usual in God's economy, the light of His deliverance came at the very darkest moment of despair. Every succeeding year made the likelihood of her becoming a mother more hopeless, and the taunts of her persecutor gained more force as their foundation became more sure. On going up to Shiloh on one of the fore-mentioned occasions, this malignant woman treated her with the wonted indignity. Hannah's spirit was sorely wounded, and she would not eat. The good Elkanah pressed her to eat and drink, saying, "Why weepest thou, and why eatest thou not, and why is thy heart grieved? Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" She was prevailed upon to eat and drink by these kind words from him, who alone had any right to find fault with her childless state. As soon as their meal was finished, she rose up and went, according to the custom of devout women, to pray at the tabernacle. There, in great bitterness of soul, she wept and prayed, and, pouring out her heart unto the Lord, vowed unto Him a vow, that if He would look upon the affliction of his handmaid, and give her a boy, then she would give him, as a

Nazirite, to the Lord all the days of his life. During this act of devotion, so strongly was she affected, although she spoke not with her voice, but only in the heart, that Eli, the high-priest, who was sitting in his chair of state at the time, thought that she was drunken, and bade her go home. Her meek and pious answer satisfied Eli that she was no daughter of Belial, and he made ample amends for his unjust reproach, by giving her his blessing. "Go in peace, and the God of Heaven grant thee thy petition, that thou asked of Him," he said. The motions of his own heart, thus confirmed by the mouth of God's high-priest, convinced her that her prayer was granted. She quitted the tabernacle with a joyful heart, and next morning left Shiloh never to return in sorrow.

In due course of time her faith obtained its reward, and the high-priest's blessing was realised. Great was her joy. The reproach of barrenness was removed from her, and she found that treasure which is beyond all price, the fulfilment of her prayers. For what greater riches can a devout mind find than the assurance of the acceptance of its prayers? It sees proof that it is at peace with God. Its prayer has been heard by Him Who shutteth His ears to the prayer of the wicked, while they are ever open to the petition of the just. It has procured a Friend in need, Whom no need can deter : it has obtained favour with a King, Who knows no change of will. It has received the seal of approval from Him Who knows the bottom of the heart much better than its owner. It is pronounced a vessel of honour in His house, which is built in Heaven for evermore. Henceforward it casts fear out of its service, and obeys from pure love. Such a mind must have been in Hannah when she cast the first look upon her first-born, and called him Samuel, or Heard-of-God. She did not return to Shiloh, until, having weaned her son, she took him up with her to present to the Lord, according to her vow. Having made the customary sacrifice, she surrendered him into the charge of Eli, and worshipped, and gave thanks in a Hymn, which was deemed worthy to afford a model for the thanksgiving song of the Blessed Virgin.

Thus she parted with the child of her prayer : with her as yet only-begotten. But she left him in the house of the Lord Who had given him. She threw him upon the care of the Lord, not with that faint and self-deluding hope with which many a parent has endeavoured to sweeten the bitterness of parting with a child, whom the world is demanding for its perilous service—not in a metaphor familiar to the mouth, but little understood by the heart—but literally and truly as she would have committed him to the hands of a guardian whom she saw and heard. Her boy henceforward ministered to the Lord before Eli ; so soon did the Lord provide for him. The old man, cut to the heart by the wickedness of his sons, was soothed by the company of this innocent child. He experienced that melancholy delight which the feeling mind ever derives from such company, when the purity and health of the child remind us at once of our own former state, our present state, and of the contrast which may, perhaps, be exhibited by the man. Meanwhile Hannah, ever as the annual festival came round, and she went with her husband to sacrifice at Shiloh, had the opportunity of seeing her boy, and took him always a new tunic. She had the satisfaction of seeing that he grew in favour both with the Lord and with man. How thankfully now did she remember the bitter and sorrowful feelings with which she had formerly attended the Lord's house at this season. She came not now to fast and weep before God, broken-hearted with the reproach of man. She was a mother in Israel ; mother of a son in whom every one acknowledged that she had reason for all a mother's pride and delight. Her heart was most exalted where formerly it was most abased. So had God rewarded her patience ; so in the end did He return sevenfold into her bosom, for the many and weary years of sorrow which she had endured with such exemplary resignation. Nor did God's bounty stay here. Three sons more were born. Thus the mouth of her persecutor was stopped ; and henceforward the wretched Peninnah's name, which appears but for shame, has no longer a place in the pages of Scripture. So fares the reviler. He may gain a noisy name for the moment, which, if not soon forgotten, survives but through the brightness of the character which he sought to blacken, and which now it sets off with its own blackness, as darkness does the stars.

Hannah's name is bright indeed. She gave to Israel a judge, the like of whom had not arisen since the days of Joshua. She was looked up to with veneration, as indeed a mother in Israel ; and she has bequeathed to the Church of God, of which she was so faithful a member, a distinct assurance of the efficacy of a lively hope in God against all hope. Her name was written in the heart of every mother in Israel ; and the Blessed

Virgin, when a promise was pronounced to her, such as had never been made to woman since the days of Eve, immediately thought of Hannah, and used her words to help the expression of her thanksgiving. At this day she stands a bright example to every daughter of the Church, encouraging them ever to hold fast the hope of consolation, which our Lord has rendered still more distinct than Hannah could entertain it, in saying, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Samuel

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"She bare a son, and called his name Samuel," etc.—1 Samuel i. 20.

Different derivations have been given of the name of Samuel—"Name of God," "placed by God," "asked of God." Josephus makes it correspond to the well-known Greek name *Theaitetus*, "heard of God." This, which may have the same meaning as the previous derivation, is the most obvious. He was the last Judge, the first of the regular succession of Prophets, and the founder of the monarchy. So important a position did Samuel hold in Jewish history as to have given his name to the sacred book, now divided into two, which covers the whole period of the first establishment of the kingdom, corresponding to the manner in which the name of Moses had been assigned to the sacred book, now divided into five, which covers the period of the foundation of the Jewish Church itself. In fact, no character of equal magnitude had arisen since the death of the great Lawgiver.

He was the son of Elkanah, an Ephrathite or Ephraimite, and Hannah or Anna. His father is one of the few private citizens in whose household we find polygamy. It may possibly have arisen from the irregularity of the period. All that appears with certainty of his birthplace is that it was in the hills of Ephraim. At the foot of the hill was a well (1 Sam. xix. 22). On the brow of its two summits was the city. It never lost its hold on Samuel, who in later life made it his fixed abode.

It is on the mother of Samuel that our chief attention is fixed in the account of his birth. She is described as a woman of a high religious mission. Almost a Nazirite by practice (1 Sam. i. 15), and a prophetess in her gifts (1 Sam. ii. 1), she sought from God the gift of a child for which she longed with the passionate devotion of silent prayer, of which there is no other example in the Old Testament, and when the son was granted, the name which he bore, and thus first introduced into the world, expressed her sense of the agency of her entreaty—Samuel—"the asked or Heard of God."

Living in the great age of vows, she had before his birth dedicated him to the office of a Nazirite. As soon as he was weaned, she herself with her husband brought him to the Tabernacle of Shiloh, where she had received the first intimation of his birth, and there solemnly consecrated him. Then his mother made him over to Eli (1 Sam. i. 25, 28). From this time the child is shut up in the Tabernacle. The priests furnished him with a sacred garment, an ephod, made, like their own, of white linen, though of inferior quality, and his mother every year, apparently, at the only time of their meeting, gave him a little mantle reaching down to his feet, such as was worn only by high personages, or women, over the other dress, and such as he retained, as his badge, till the latest times of his life. He seems to have slept within the holiest place (1 Sam. iii. 3), and his special duty was to put out, as it would seem, the sacred candlestick, and to open the doors at sunrise.

In this way his childhood was passed. It was whilst thus sleeping in the Tabernacle that he received his first prophetic call. The stillness of the night—the sudden voice—the childlike misconception—the venerable Eli—the contrast between the terrible doom and the gentle creature who was to announce it—give to this portion of the narrative a universal interest. It is this side of Samuel's career that has been so well caught in the well-known picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

From this moment the prophetic character of Samuel was established. His words were treasured up, and Shiloh became the resort of those who came to hear him (1 Sam. iii. 19-21). In the overthrow of the sanctuary which followed shortly on this vision, we hear not what became of Samuel. He next appears, probably twenty years afterwards,

suddenly amongst the people, warning them against their idolatrous practices. He convened an assembly at Mizpeh, and there with a symbolical rite, expressive partly of deep humiliation, partly of the libations of a treaty, they poured water on the ground, they fasted, and they entreated Samuel to raise the piercing cry, for which he was known, in supplication to God for them. It was at the moment he was offering up a sacrifice, and sustaining this loud cry, that the Philistines' host suddenly burst upon them. A violent thunderstorm, and (according to Josephus) an earthquake came to the timely assistance of Israel. The Philistines fled, and exactly at the spot where twenty years before they had obtained their great victory, they were totally routed. A stone was set up, which long remained as a memorial of Samuel's triumph, and gave to the place its name of Eben-ezer, "the Stone of Help," which has thence passed into Christian phraseology, and become a common name of Nonconformist chapels (1 Sam. vii. 12). The old Canaanites, whom the Philistines had dispossessed in the outskirts of the Judæan hills, seemed to have helped in the battle, and a large portion of territory was recovered (1 Sam. vi. 14). This was Samuel's first, and as far as we know, his only military achievement. But as in the case of the earlier chiefs who bore that name, it was apparently this which raised him to the office of "Judge." He visited in discharge of his duties as ruler, the three chief sanctuaries on the west of Jordan, Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh (1 Sam. vii. 16). His own residence was still his native city, Ramah, which he further consecrated by an altar. Here he married, and two sons grew up to repeat under his eyes the same perversion of high office that he had himself witnessed in his childhood, in the case of the two sons of Eli. One was Abiah, the other Joel. In his old age, according to the quasi-hereditary principle, already adopted by previous Judges, he shared his power with them, and they exercised their functions at the southern frontier in Beersheba.

Down to this point in Samuel's life, there is but little to distinguish his career from that of his predecessors. Like many characters in later days, had he died in youth his fame would hardly have been greater than that of Gideon or Samson. He was a judge, a Nazirite, a warrior, and (to a certain point) a prophet.

But his peculiar position in the sacred narrative turns on the events which follow. He is the inaugurator of the transition from what is commonly called the theocracy to the monarchy. The misdemeanour of his own sons, in receiving bribes, and in extorting exorbitant interest on loans (1 Sam. viii. 3, 4), precipitated the catastrophe which had been long preparing. The people demanded a king. Josephus describes the shock to Samuel's mind, "because of his inborn sense of justice, because of his hatred of kings, as so far inferior to the aristocratic form of government, which conferred a godlike character on those who lived under it." For the whole night he lay fasting and sleepless, in the perplexity of doubt and difficulty. In the vision of that night, as recorded by the sacred historian, is given the dark side of the new institution, on which Samuel dwells on the following day (1 Sam. viii. 9-18). This presents his reluctance to receive the new order of things. The whole narrative of the reception and consecration of Saul, gives his acquiescence in it.

The final conflict of feeling and surrender of his office is given in the last assembly over which he presided, and in his subsequent relations with Saul. The assembly was held at Gilgal, immediately after the victory over the Ammonites. The monarchy was a second time solemnly inaugurated. "All the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." Then takes place Samuel's farewell address. By this time the long flowing locks on which no razor had ever passed were white with age (1 Sam. xii. 2). He appeals to their knowledge of his integrity. Whatever might be the lawless habits of the chiefs of those times—Hophni, Phinehas, or his own sons—he had kept aloof from all. No ox or ass had he taken from their stalls—no bribe to obtain his judgment—not even a sandal. It is this appeal, and the response of the people, that has made Grotius call him the Jewish Aristides. He then sums up the new situation in which they have placed themselves; and, although "the wickedness of asking a king," is still strongly insisted on, and the unusual portent of a thunderstorm in May or June, in answer to Samuel's prayer, is urged as a sign of Divine displeasure (1 Sam. xii. 16-19), the general tone of the condemnation is much softened from that which was pronounced on the first intimation of the change. The first king is repeatedly acknowledged as "the Messiah," or, "anointed of the Lord," the future prosperity of the nation is declared to depend on their use or misuse of the new constitution, and Samuel retires with expressions of goodwill and hope:—"I will teach you the good and the right way, . . . only fear the Lord."

It is the most signal example afforded in the Old Testament, of a great character reconciling himself to a changed order of things, and of the Divine sanction resting on his acquiescence.

His subsequent relations with Saul are of the same mixed kind. The two institutions which they respectively represented ran on side by side. Samuel was still Judge. He judged "Israel all the days of his life" (1 Sam. vii. 15), and from time to time came across the king's path. But these interventions were chiefly in another capacity, which this is the place to unfold.

Samuel is called emphatically "The Prophet" (Acts iii. 24; xiii. 20). To a certain extent this was in consequence of the gift which he shared in common with others of his time. He was especially known in his own age as "Samuel the Seer" (1 Chron. ix. 22; xxvi. 28). "I am the Seer," was his answer to those who asked "where is the Seer?" "Where is the Seer's house?" (1 Sam. ix. 11). "Seer," the ancient name, was not yet superseded by "prophet." Of the three modes by which Divine communications were then made, "by dreams, Urim and Thummim, and prophets," the first was that by which the Divine will was made known to Samuel (1 Sam. iii. 1-2). "The Lord uncovered his ear" to whisper into it in the stillness of the night the messages that were to be delivered. It is the first distinct intimation of the idea of "Revelation" to a human being. He was consulted far and near on the small affairs of life; loaves of "bread," or "the fourth part of a shekel of silver," were paid for the answers (1 Sam. ix. 7, 8). From this faculty, combined with his office of ruler, an awful reverence grew up round him. No sacrificial feast was thought complete without his blessing. When he appeared suddenly elsewhere for the same purpose, the villagers "trembled" at his approach (1 Sam. xvi. 4, 5). A peculiar virtue was believed to reside in his intercession. He was conspicuous in later times amongst those that "*call* upon the name of the Lord" (Psa. xcix. 6), and was placed with Moses as "standing" for prayer, in a special sense, "before the Lord" (Jer. xv. 1). It was the last consolation he left in his parting address, that he would "pray to the Lord" for the people. There was something peculiar in the long sustained cry or shout of supplication, which seemed to draw down as by force the Divine answer (1 Sam. vii. 8, 9). All night long, in agitated moments, "he *cried* unto the Lord" (1 Sam. xv. 11). But there are two other points which more especially placed him at the head of the prophetic order as it afterwards appeared. The first is brought out in his relation with Saul, the second in his relation with David. He represents the independence of the moral law, of the Divine Will, as distinct from regal or sacerdotal enactments, which is so remarkable a characteristic of all the later prophets. He certainly was not a priest; and all the attempts to identify his opposition to Saul with a hierarchical interest are founded on a complete misconception of the facts of the case. From the time of the overthrow of Shiloh, he never appears in the remotest connection with the priestly order. Amongst all the places included in his personal or administrative visits, neither Shiloh, nor Nob, nor Gibeon, the seats of the sacerdotal caste, are ever mentioned. When he counsels Saul, it is not as the priest but as the prophet; when he sacrifices or blesses the sacrifices, it is not as the priest, but either as an individual Israelite of eminence, or as a ruler, like Saul himself. Saul's sin in both cases where he came into collision with Samuel, was not of intruding into sacerdotal functions, but of disobedience to the prophetic voice. The first was that of not waiting for Samuel's arrival, according to the sign given by Samuel at his original meeting at Ramah (1 Sam. x. 8; xiii. 8); the second was that of not carrying out the stern prophetic injunction for the destruction of the Amalekites. When, on that occasion, the aged prophet called the captive prince before him, and with his own hands hacked him limb from limb, in retribution for the desolation he had brought into the homes of Israel, and thus offered up his mangled remains almost as a human sacrifice, ("before the Lord in Gilgal"), we see the representative of the older part of the Jewish history. But it is the true prophetic utterance, such as breathes through the psalmists and prophets, when he says to Saul in words which, from their poetical form, must have become fixed in the national memory, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

The parting was not one of rivals, but of dear though divided friends. The king throws himself on the prophet with all his force; not without a vehement effort the prophet tears himself away. The long mantle by which he was always known is rent in the struggle; and, like Ahijah after him, Samuel was in this the omen of the coming rent in the monarchy. They parted, each to his house, to meet no more. But a long shadow of grief fell over the prophet. "Samuel mourned for Saul." "It grieved

Samuel for Saul." "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" (1 Sam. xv. 11, 35; xvi. 1).

The next point is that he is the first of a regular succession of Prophets. "All the Prophets from Samuel and those that follow after." (Acts iii. 24). . . . The connection of the continuity of the office with Samuel appears to be direct. It is in his life-time, long after he had been "established as a prophet," that we hear of the companies of disciples, called in the Old Testament "the sons of the prophets."

All the peculiarities of their education are implied or expressed—the sacred dance, the sacred music, the solemn procession (1 Sam. x. 5, 10; 1 Chron. xxv. 1, 6). At the head of this congregation, or "church as it were, within a church," Samuel is expressly described as "standing appointed over them." Their chief residence at this time, was at Samuel's own abode, Ramah, where they lived in habitations apparently of a rustic kind, like the leafy huts which Elisha's disciples afterwards occupied by the Jordan.

In those schools, and learning to cultivate the prophetic gifts, were some, whom we know for certain, others whom we may almost certainly conjecture, to have been so trained or influenced. One was Saul. Twice at least he is described as having been in the company of Samuel's disciples, and as having caught from them the prophetic fervour, to such a degree as to have "prophesied among them" (1 Sam. x. 10, 11), and on one occasion, to have thrown off his clothes, and to have passed the night in a state of prophetic trance (1 Sam. xix. 24): and even in his palace, the prophesying mingled with his madness on ordinary occasions (1 Sam. xviii. 9). Another was David. The first acquaintance of Samuel with David was when he privately anointed him at the house of Jesse. But the connexion thus begun with the shepherd boy must have been continued afterwards. David, at first, fled to "Naioth in Ramah," as to his second home, and the gifts of music, of song, and of prophecy, here developed on so large a scale, were exactly such as we find in the notices of those who looked up to Samuel as their father. It is, further, hardly possible to escape the conclusion that David there first met his fast friends and companions in after life, prophets like himself—Gad and Nathan.

It is needless to enlarge on the importance with which these incidents invest the appearance of Samuel. He there becomes the spiritual father of the psalmist king. He is also the founder of the first regular institutions of religious instruction, and communities for the purpose of education. The schools of Greece were not yet in existence. From these Jewish institutions were developed, by a natural order, the universities of Christendom; and it may be further added, that with this view the whole life of Samuel is in accordance. He is the Prophet—the only Prophet till the time of Isaiah—of whom we know that he was so from his earliest years. It is this continuity of his own life and character, that makes him so fit an instrument for conducting his nation through so great a change. The death of Samuel is described as taking place in the year of the close of David's wanderings. It is said with peculiar emphasis, as if to mark the loss, that "*all the Israelites,*" all—with a universality never specified before—"were gathered together," from all parts of this hitherto divided country, and "lamented him" and "buried him," not in any consecrated place, but within his own house, thus in a manner consecrated by being turned into his tomb (1 Sam. xxv. 1). His relics were translated "from Judæa" (the place is not specified) *A.D.* 406, to Constantinople, and received there with much pomp by the Emperor Arcadius. They were landed at the pier of Chalcedon, and thence conveyed to a church, near the palace of Hebdomon.

The situation of Ramathaim is uncertain. But the place long pointed out as his tomb, is the height, most conspicuous of all in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, immediately above the town of Gibeon, known to the Crusaders as "Montjoye," as the spot from whence they first saw Jerusalem, now called Nebysamwil, "the Prophet Samuel." It is the only spot in Palestine which claims any direct connexion with the first great Prophet, who was born within its limits; and its commanding situation well agrees with the importance assigned to him in the sacred history.

Samuel

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."—1 Samuel iii. 20.

Whilst the troubled life of the Danite judge was running out its wild course, another Nazirite from the womb was growing up in Israel under other influences and with a far

different destiny before him. He, too, was given to a long barren mother, in answer to the cry of her half-broken heart. Deep sorrow had, through the grace of God, wrought in her its true work, and brought her to cast herself, with all her cares and oppressions, at His feet. In every sense of the words, Samuel was given to her prayers. Given in his natural life; given, too,—as St. Augustine was given to the prayers of Monica, and as so many saints besides have one by one been given,—in his spiritual life, to the cry of her heart to her God. She herself practised the abstinence from wine and strong drink which formed so large a part of the Nazirite vow, and she devoted the child for whom she prayed, not only to bear from his birth the ordinary obligations of a Nazirite, but also to render to the Lord a life-long service. Accordingly, when he is three years old, she brings him up to the sanctuary at Shiloh, and leaves that precious life with the high priest Eli. There that holy childhood grew on, fed by the special dew of the Blessed Spirit. Every opening faculty of his young heart was thus from the first consecrated to God, whilst with childish blamelessness, girded with a linen ephod, he ministered in the sanctuary by day, and lay down within its precincts to sleep at night.

Great and pregnant with mighty issues was the life which was being thus guarded. In him the line of the Judges was to end, in him the mysterious catalogue of the Prophets was to begin. It was a great crisis in the dealings of God with His people. They were to be recalled to Him, to be roused out of their apathy and spiritual deadness, to be consecrated anew to Him. They were to be delivered from the yoke of their oppressing enemies; their national life was to be developed; they were to be consolidated into a kingdom, instead of being held loosely together as a congeries of tribes.

To meet the needs which this new development of national life must create, the prophetic office was called into being. The child Samuel—ministering in his linen ephod, clothed with the long garment of honourable proportions which his saintly mother brought him year by year when with his Levitical father she journeyed from Ramah to offer the appointed sacrifice—comes forth first before us from that shrouding which ever hangs so thick around a holy childhood as supernaturally called by God to this prophetic office. How that “uncovering of the year” was wrought we are not distinctly told; but the whole narrative forbids the supposition that it was upon the mind alone of Samuel that the voice of the Almighty fell. There was, it is plain, an act upon the part of God antecedent to the impression made on Samuel; and the voice which spoke was doubtless real, as through the still silence of the holy tent its mysterious accents fell upon his watching ear, and syllabled out to his trembling soul the singleness of his own name.

So the long silence of God to His people was broken. That Word of God which was so “precious” from its rarity began again to sound in Israel, and the “open vision” which the mists of idol-worship had veiled revealed to the holy child its sacred proportions. At once the special character of the new office is declared by the prophetic youth being sent to the high priest himself with the message of the Lord. Those young lips utter the tremendous doom, declaring by the natural feebleness of the instrument how entirely it is the voice of another which speaks through them; and so the old man receives the words. To him plainly they are not Samuel’s; his dim eyes can trace “the Presence” being now restored to Israel, and his saddened utterance is that of one who felt through all his frame Jehovah’s nearness when he said, “It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good (1 Sam. iii. 18). How does the startling sight of the lad of twelve years old (for so his age has been reckoned), standing with such a word of prophecy before the marvelling chief priest, point on to Him, the one true Prophet, in Whom all the lines of God’s dealings with man converge, of Whose days “all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, have foretold,” as He too, coming forth from His holy home at Nazareth, was found at twelve years old sitting in the Temple in the midst of the astonished doctors of the law, both hearing them and asking them questions!

When next the prophetic power rested upon Samuel we know not; but that it did again and again reveal itself is most distinctly stated in the words, “Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him,” etc. (1 Sam. iii. 19—21).

Such had been his childhood and his youth, when the storm of predicted judgment fell upon his people. Roused at last to resistance by intolerable oppression, Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. But though “the word of Samuel came to all Israel,” it is not written that they took any counsel of the Lord through him. Their insurrection was but the natural outbreak of the oppressed against the oppressor. There had been no putting away of their idols, no turning to their fathers’ God, no seeking, as it seems, of

His direction; and so, when "they joined battle Israel was smitten before the Philistines." Then came another exhibition of that spiritual blindness with which the evil lives of their priests had done so much to darken their souls. They had seen abominable iniquity so ostentatiously united with the performance of all the outward acts of their enjoined worship, so abundant around the very doors of the tabernacle (1 Sam. ii. 22) itself, that they had grown to trust in the visible tokens of the invisible presence, instead of believing in the Lord their God. "Let us fetch," was the cry of this dark superstition, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." This was a form of misbelief into which the dark hosts of infidel Philistia could enter, and they too trembled at the coming of the ark. But they trembled needlessly. Israel must be taught its lesson by the hands of the heathen. The people of Jehovah must know that not in the priesthood, or in sacrifice, or in the shrine of Shiloh, or in the ark itself, but in the living God was their defence against their enemies; and so, as before, "Israel was smitten, and there was a very great slaughter, and the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain." Then was Ichabod indeed written on Shiloh, and upon every door-post in Israel. Then indeed did Philistia triumph. For twenty years, as it seems, from this decisive victory she held her cruel heathen sway over the people of Jehovah.

Where Samuel was during this interval, we know not. It was doubtless needful for him to be thus for a season withdrawn from action and observation. His holy childhood and his prophetic youth needed calm, silence, introspection, and secret communion with God, to mature the great strength of his after life.

Those twenty years of Samuel's hidden life were a weary time for Israel. Throughout their span Philistia asserted and cemented her dominion over the chosen people. This was probably the season of Samson's single-handed acts of heroic bravery, ending with his mighty destruction of his enemies under the crashing ruins of the Dagon house at Gaza. Samson's deeds of heroism must have stirred many hearts in Israel and aroused the sunken spirits of her sons. But they needed a deeper awakening yet before they could break the yoke of the heathen. There must be a turning of their hearts to God before He would bare His arm for their deliverance. For such a return to Him the sorrows of these twenty years had been preparing their souls. The ark abode in Kirjath Jearim. The time was long; for it was twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. For such a time the Prophet had been kept in that still shelter of the hand of the Almighty. Now he suddenly appears again in Israel. His words catch the tone of that lamenting penitence which had at last begun to stir the national heart. "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." And they answered to his call, and put away the strange gods. And he gathered them at Mizpeh for a searching national humiliation. Then in the absence of the ark, and with Shiloh desolate, and the great priestly office in abeyance, the Prophet, under the leading of the Spirit, himself offered a burnt-offering, and made intercession for his people; and God accepted them. To the wild, passionate Samson it had been given "*to begin* to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines." But the strong man had lacked that turning of the heart to God with which the new Nazirite opened his commission. He was to effect what the other had begun; to him was given the far greater charge of beating down Philistia, and at once he set about fulfilling it. Even as he offered the sacrifice the fierce cry of a coming multitude mingled wildly with his prayer; the weeping penitents looked up to see the great Prophet in the long mantle, which from his holy childhood had ever been his garb, standing with his long Nazirite locks floating on the hill-side breeze, in the energy of supplication; "crying unto the Lord" before the altar of burnt-offering, whilst on the other side they could already note the dark hosts of Philistia marching on with all the confidence bred by accustomed victory to the dreaded encounter. Then in his prophetic power Samuel poured down upon the astonished assailants the ancient might of Israel, when loud above all the din of the battle broke forth on every side of Heaven the pealing answer of Jehovah's thunder. A panic terror fell upon the uncircumcised, and they were utterly discomfited, and slain with such a slaughter that they were "subdued and came no more unto the coast of Israel; and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistine all the days of Samuel."

The wearied land rested and breathed again with ease under the great deliverance. The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were delivered out of the hands

of the heathen; the neighbouring Amorite tribes made peace with the conquerors, and "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. He went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places, and his return was to Ramah, for there was his house, and there he judged Israel, and there he built an altar unto the Lord." Such he was in his official life as judge over Israel; of an incorruptible purity, of unwearied diligence, of undisputed power, of life-long continuance.

But there was another side to this great character. In him the temporal administration of the judge, noble as it was, is cast wholly into the shade by the brightness of his prophetic office. But besides this, two circumstances of the life of Samuel tend to aggravate its grandeur and bring out all its variety of aspect. The first was, that for him it was appointed to guide the difficult transition of Israel's political organization from a Divinely ruled republic into a regularly constituted monarchy. He was the last of the judges, and under his rule their long line, which through four hundred and fifty years had been God's gift to His people, passed into that of the anointed kings of Israel.

The second cause of the greatness of Samuel's prophetic administration is to be found in the character of Saul, by whom he stood as an external conscience; as a director, and revealer, and speaker of the Will of God to one of the most wayward of men. The relation between the king and the prophet, as it was established by God, was, that prophetic utterances were to be received by the ruler of His people as coming directly from His own mouth. Early in Saul's reign his obedience to such "a word" was tried with some severity. In the third year of his reign his gallant son Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines on the hill of Geba. Forthwith the whole might of their old oppressors was put forth for one great effort, to reimpose upon their escaping victims the detested yoke of the uncircumcised.

The Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, "a people as the sand that is on the sea-shore in multitude." The scarcely recovered courage of the men of Israel fainted at the sight. The greater number hid themselves away from the terrible enemy "in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits"; even the few less faint-hearted men who still kept the field "followed Saul trembling." It seemed to the eye of sense that there was madness in waiting, as the Prophet had bid him do, seven days in Gilgal, until he came down and offered sacrifice, and showed him what he should do (1 Sam. x. 8). That waiting appeared simply ruinous. Day by day the enemy grew bolder; day by day his own troops more down-hearted and demoralised. The winds of danger told sorely upon the ill-cemented mass, and like the sands under the blast of the desert, they were scattered from him.

Still for seven days he waited, fretting under the command, and with a growing impatience at its unreasonable requirement. The seventh day came, and the Prophet still tarried; longer the rising wilfulness of the king's nature could not submit, and disobediently he himself offered the sacrifice. No sooner has he offered than Samuel appears. Saul goes out to seek the prophet's blessing; but that blessing is turned into reproofs, which the excuses of the wayward king cannot turn aside—"Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God. Thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee" (1 Sam. xiii. 14). Here is the first voice of the thunder of coming judgment; distant, undefined, as from an almost unclouded sky; capable of being averted. It leads to no separation between him and the Prophet. Samuel goes up to Gibeah of Benjamin with the king. The Spirit of God has been grieved, but it does not leave him. He strengthens himself on his throne. Years pass on, and bring with them victories and power. "He took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, and whithersoever he turned he vexed them." Once or twice the wilful temper of his soul breaks forth; but on the whole he fights bravely the battle of Israel, and prospers in his ways.

Fourteen years have passed away, when again the discipline of his life gathers itself up into a special trial. The great Prophet's voice brings him a new commission from his God, and preludes it by a note of very special warning. "The Lord sent me to anoint thee to be king over His people; now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the Lord." That tone of adjuration surely tells all. It speaks the Prophet's judgment of his character; it tells of prayers and intercession, of days of watching and nights of grief, for one he loved so well, as he saw growing on that darkening countenance the

deepening lines of wilfulness. The prophet sees that this will be a crisis in that life-history, with which, by God's own hand, his own has been so strangely intertwined. He gives the king the charge of God to "smite Amalek, to destroy them utterly, and spare none." To go forth on this campaign suited well the martial and violent temper of Saul, and he readily obeyed. The assault was perfectly successful. But the wilful heart of the conqueror could not obey entirely. He could not resist the temptation to bring back in triumph the captive king of Amalek, or to spare the flocks and herds which might enrich Israel. The sentence of God was not long delayed. As he returned with his victorious troops, the Prophet met him with a reproof, sterner far than when fourteen years before he had chidden his early disobedience. Now the thunder-cloud, then distant and well-nigh undiscernible, darkens the whole sky, and peals over the sinner's head. "Stay," is the sad and terrible voice as it breaks through the cobweb films of self-deception and excuse, "and I will tell THEE what the Lord hath said to me this night.

. . . . The Lord sent thee and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil?" Then comes again, with trembling dishonesty, out of that once strong man's mouth, the poor excuse, "The people . . . took of the spoil to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal"—the very utterance of dark superstition and mean equivocation. And forthwith, like the darting down of the brightness of the lightning's flash, the Prophet's voice gathers itself up into one of those magnificent utterances which, belonging to another and a later dispensation, antedate the coming revelation, and are evidently launched forth from the open "ark of the testimony" of the Highest—"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and in sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Because THOU hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected THEE from being king." And now judgment—as is its terrible wont—gathered round him in contracting circles. The doom was irreversible. "The Strength of Israel is not a man . . . that He should repent."

It was a fearful meeting—it was followed by an almost life-long parting. "Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death." Once only in life, some seventeen years later, the king, when too far hardened in his wilfulness for instruction or reproof, saw again that face, to sink at Naioth under its prophetic power. But still upon the hill of Ramah, where the Prophet dwelt, the cry of mourning intercession ceased not: "Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul." The judgments of the God that heareth prayer seem to have been stayed by that mighty supplication of him who is classed by the Word of God with Moses, as the greatest of human intercessors. And so, with faithful love, the Prophet cried unto his God, until the voice which in his childhood had spoken to him the transference of the priesthood of Eli, now told him of the removal of God's anointing from Saul to David in these fearful tones: "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go unto Jesse the Bethlehemitte, for I have provided Me a king among his sons."

At the peril of his life from the anger of the king, Samuel goes, and guided against his natural judgment to David, pours on his head the anointing oil, and the Spirit of the Lord owns the commanded act, and comes from that day forward upon David. Then the cloud settles darker and darker upon the rejected king. The Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. That self-willed heart was haunted by the gloomy delusions which usher in despair. Reason trembled on her seat of rule; whilst passion and hatred led madness on, and seated her instead upon the throne of inward mastery. For years the awful conflict lasted; gleams of light there were, but evermore the darkness deepened, and its evil, half-discerned figures thronged him in wilder and multiplied companionship, and gathered closer around him. Upon David, his preferred successor, all the hatred of his soul concentrated its venom. How must the ever-during "mourning" of the Prophet have grown sadder in its tones as he saw the utter wreck of that early brightened life! Happy was it for him that he lived not to see its bitter end upon the mountains of Gilboa. But he had set for all time the great example of the office of the Prophet of the Lord, when called to stand in God's name not only by the side of His willing and obedient servant, but also amidst the deep shadows which settled on the wilful king.

Nor was it only the lineaments of this great model and example which this first of the Prophets left for after times. With that prescient eye which belonged to one employed to conduct the nation and the Church of Israel through a great transition in its history,

he foresaw the need of providing a new system of training for those who should be his successors in the prophetic office. For this end he formed into fixed societies the sharers of the mysterious gift, which was plainly capable of cultivation and enlargement.

As at every leading crisis of the dealings of God with man, unusual operations of the Spirit marked the time of Samuel. They were not confined to him, though his is far the most conspicuous figure on the canvas. "There was the company of the Prophets, and Samuel standing as appointed over them" (1 Sam. xix. 20). Thus he provided for the time when he no longer could uphold in person the new institution. For he too was bowed by age and must sleep with his fathers.

Peacefully and gradually the change passed over him. It was the due end of his even and consistent life. It was a grand parting between him and Israel when he laid down the active exercise of the judge's office to hand it over to the king they had desired. Equable progression from the beginning to the end was the special characteristic of the life of Samuel. No sudden development of military prowess lifted him from common life into the judge's office. The Nazirite vow was marked on him by promise even before he was born; the morning dew of grace glistened on him from his birth; his childhood was open to special visitations of God's grace in the stillness of the sanctuary and amidst the sanctities of Shiloh. Of the life which followed this he could speak without contradiction or dispute: "I am old and grey-headed . . . and I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Behold, here I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed." The death was like the life; it was the gathering up of the feet into the bed, the calmest lying down to die; the whole inspired record of it is the three solemn words, "And Samuel died." So giveth He His beloved rest.

Samuel

BY REV. THEODORE J. HOLMES.

"And the men of Kirjath-jearim came," etc.—1 Samuel vii. 1—12.

It was a sad day for Israel when the ark was removed from Shiloh. In Deuteronomy there is repeated reference to the fact that God desired a particular place for His sanctuary, a place which, in the first chapter of Joshua, is declared to be Shiloh, a town in the centre of Canaan, accessible to all the tribes. Here the ark was set by Divine command, and without permission no one had a right to take it away. But when in the battle at Aphek Israel was losing the day, the elders said: "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." But when it came they were disappointed. It brought no re-inforcement in their sore need. While they were disobeying God, it could give them no support. It exerted no power in the fight, but was itself taken captive and moved by the Philistines to one of their cities, Ashdod, where it brought grievous trouble to the inhabitants. It vindicated there the sacred character with which it had been invested. Being set up in the temple by the side of Dagon, the image was soon found prostrate on the ground and mutilated; even the heathen being forced to acknowledge that Jehovah was God.

The removal of the ark to Gath, another of the Philistine cities, brought there the same distress. So, wherever it was borne, it carried retribution, till finally it was taken to Beth-shemesh, a city of Israel. There being treated with irreverence, it was again a minister of trouble and was moved to Kirjath-jearim, where it remained for twenty years, till the events recorded in this chapter. The people by this time were coming to realize their spiritual state. Their connection with Jehovah was broken; He was not near them to guide and defend, but far away, with His face averted as though He were angry. Something was wrong while the ark was not in Shiloh.

It was, we understand, Samuel's influence, the effect of his teaching and life, which showed the people their need and brought them back to God.

The history suggests the necessary steps of all religious reformation.

I. ISRAEL DESIRED THE LORD'S RETURN.

They were tired of His absence. He was not to them what He had been to their fathers in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness. They understood that the fault

was all their own; it was they who had wandered from Him; and they wanted to come back: "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord."

Evidently this must always be the first step in any spiritual quickening. If one is content with a state of coldness, unbelief, imperfect consecration, fruitless service, he will be likely to stay there; but many Christians are not satisfied with such experience: they honestly lament that their spiritual life is not what it should be; they do not seem to themselves at times to care very much about spiritual things. There is little unction in their prayer, little love in their duty; and they are not content to have it so. They want more feeling, more faith, more conscience, more will. They want, in short, to have the ark brought back to Shiloh. That is the sure beginning of reformation.

II. ISRAEL FORSOOK IDOLATRY.

After they had expressed earnestly their new desires, Samuel said: "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only." They followed this advice, and this side of their example is sufficiently clear. Everybody who believes the Bible has some desire to be a Christian. The vital question for him is whether this desire is supreme; whether he is ready to sacrifice something which hinders its attainment. What is an idol to any one in our day? Any thing which stands between him and God; any thing in itself wrong; any thing in itself right, which is perverted or loved to excess.

An inquirer, honest and earnest, surprised that the Christian way did not open to him at once, thought of something he was not willing to give up to please God: he had a library of infidel books of which he was proud, and which he could not help reading at times; but when the issue became manifest, he made the sacrifice; he burned them every one and then the way was revealed. As he said, describing his conversion: "In the flame of my idols I found light." That law touches every form of idolatry. Jesus said: "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

III. ISRAEL PRAYED.

The order here is suggestive; not before this were they ready to pray. They must prove their desire by abandoning their sin. Not until they had done this did Samuel say: "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord."

We recognise that as the Gospel rule. In one sense, prayer is the first thing; in another, it is not. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." No one has a right to approach the mercy-seat till there has been, first, repentance and, if possible, restitution, till he is willing to say honestly: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

When Israel forsook their idolatry, then they had the right to make their appeal to Samuel: "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

IV. ISRAEL RECEIVED THE BLESSING.

In response to their request, Samuel sacrificed a lamb for a burnt offering, and "the Lord heard him."

The people too had their religious service; at Mizpeh they drew water and poured it out before the Lord; that was a symbol of the pardon and cleansing they needed for the sin they confessed; or it may have been, as was common in the East, a sign of the covenant which they desired with the Lord. They observed, too, a fast, to express and deepen their humiliation. The Philistines, by their scouts, learned that the Israelites were assembled in such large numbers, and, supposing it was for a hostile purpose, they rallied their forces for battle. They made an attack at the very time when Samuel was offering the sacrifice, and the conflict thus opened brought upon them great disaster. The God Whom they defied stood in their way. He thundered upon them, and put them to utter rout. When they began to flee, the Israelites pursued them, but they understood that the victory belonged to God. The Philistines were so completely beaten and scattered that "they came no more into the coast of Israel." Then Samuel set up his monument of the victory, a stone upon which he inscribed Eben-ezer saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." We wonder that he did not at once take the ark to Shiloh; but probably he was not at liberty to. Shiloh's day was gone. The Psalmist says: "God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh." When the people rebelled against His authority, it could be no longer used for His sanctuary; it was to be wiped out of existence. There are some judgments which even a great reformation can not avert. The ark remained in Beth-shemesh till David, at the beginning of his reign, removed it to Jerusalem. Still,

though Shiloh must be destroyed, Jehovah was gracious. If Israel would keep their vows and would be true to Him, He would continue to be their refuge and strength, giving them in the future more even than they had known in the past, the glory which belonged to the people of God.

Saul

BY REV. J. H. NEWMAN, B.D.

"I gave thee a king in Mine anger," etc.—Hosea xiii. 11.

The Israelites seem to have asked for a king from an unthankful caprice and waywardness. The ill conduct, indeed, of Samuel's sons was the occasion of the sin, but "an evil heart of unbelief," was the real cause of it. Their carnal hearts did not love the neighbourhood of Heaven; and, like the inhabitants of Gadara afterwards, they prayed that Almighty God would depart from their coasts.

Such were some of the feelings under which they desired a king like the nations; and God at length granted their request. To punish them, He gave them a king *after their own heart*, Saul, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; of whom the text speaks in these terms, "I gave them a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath."

Saul, the king whom God gave them, had much to recommend him to minds greedy of the dust of the earth. He was brave, daring, resolute; gifted, too, with strength of body as well as of mind—a circumstance which seems to have attracted their admiration. Both his virtues and his faults were such as became an eastern monarch, and were adapted to secure the fear and submission of his subjects. Pride, haughtiness, obstinacy, reserve, jealousy, caprice—these, in their way, were not unbecoming qualities in the king after whom their imaginations roved. On the other hand, the better parts of his character were of an excellence sufficient to engage the affection of Samuel himself.

The first announcement of his elevation came upon him suddenly, but apparently without unsettling him. He kept it secret, leaving it to Samuel, who had made it to him, to publish it. "Saul said unto his uncle, He" (that is, Samuel) "told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, *he told him not.*" Nay, it would even seem he was averse to the dignity intended for him; for when the Divine lot fell upon him, he hid himself, and was not discovered by the people, without recourse to Divine assistance. The appointment was at first unpopular. "The children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? They despised him, and brought him no presents, *but he held his peace.*" Soon the Ammonites invaded the country beyond Jordan, with the avowed intention of subjugating it. The people sent to Saul for relief almost in despair; and the panic spread in the interior as well as among those whose country was immediately threatened. The history proceeds:—"Behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? and they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and his anger was kindled greatly." His order for an immediate gathering throughout Israel was obeyed with the alacrity with which the multitude serve the strong-minded in times of danger. A decisive victory over the enemy followed; then the popular cry became, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death. And Saul said, *There shall not a man be put to death this day*, for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

Thus personally qualified, Saul was, moreover, a prosperous king. He had been appointed to subdue the enemies of Israel, and success attended his arms. At the end of the fourteenth chapter, we read, "So Saul took the kingdom over Israel," etc.

Such was Saul's character and success; his character faulty, yet not without promise; his success in arms as great as his carnal subjects could have desired. Yet, in spite of Samuel's private liking for him, and in spite of the good fortune which actually attended him, we find that from the beginning the Prophet's voice is raised both against people and king in warnings and rebukes, which are omens of his destined destruction, according to the text, "I gave them a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath." At the very time that Saul is publicly received as king, Samuel protests, "Ye have this day rejected your God, Who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations." In a subsequent assembly of the people, in which he testified his uprightness,

he says, "Is it not wheat-harvest to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye *may perceive and see that your wickedness is great*, in asking you a king." Again, "If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king." And after this, on the first instance of disobedience, and at first sight no very heinous sin, the sentence of rejection is passed upon him: "Thy kingdom shall not continue; the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart."

Why was Saul thus marked for vengeance from the beginning? Why these presages of misfortune, which from the first hung over him, gathered, fell in storm and tempest, and at length overwhelmed him? Is his character so essentially faulty that it must be thus distinguished for reprobation above all the anointed kings after him? Why, while David is called a man after God's own heart, should Saul be put aside as worthless?

This question leads us to a deeper inspection of his character. Now, we know, the first duty of every man is the fear of God—a reverence for His word, a love of Him, and a desire to obey Him; and, besides, it was peculiarly incumbent on the king of Israel, as God's vicegerent, by virtue of his office, to promote His glory whom his subjects had rejected.

Now Saul "lacked this one thing." His character, indeed, is obscure, and we must be cautious while considering it; still, as Scripture is given us for our instruction, it is surely right to make the most of what we find there, and to form our judgment by such lights as we possess. It would appear, then, that Saul was never under the abiding influence of religion, or, in Scripture language, "the fear of God," however he might be at times moved and softened.

Saul, it would seem, was naturally brave, active, generous, and patient; and what nature made him, such he remained, that is without improvement; with virtues which had no value, because they required no effort, and implied the influence of no principle. On the other hand, when we look for evidence of his faith, that is, his practical sense of things unseen, we discover instead a deadness to all considerations not connected with the present world. The circumstance which first introduces him to the inspired history is not in his favour. While in search of his father's asses, which were lost, he came to the city where Samuel was; and though Samuel was now an old man, and from childhood known as the especial minister and prophet of the God of Israel, Saul seems to have considered him as a mere diviner, such as might be found among the heathen, who, for "the fourth part of a shekel of silver," would tell him his way.

The narrative goes on to mention, that after his leaving Samuel "God gave him another heart," and on meeting a company of prophets, "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them." Upon this, "all that knew him beforetime" said, "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish: is Saul also among the prophets? . . . therefore it became a proverb." From this narrative we gather, that his carelessness and coldness in religious matters were so notorious, that, in the eyes of his acquaintance, there was a certain strangeness and incongruity, which at once struck the mind, in his being associated with a school of the prophets.

Nor have we any reason to believe, from the after history, that the Divine gift, then first imparted, left any religious effect upon his mind. At a later period of his life we find him suddenly brought under the same sacred influence on his entering the school where Samuel taught; but, instead of softening him, its effect upon his outward conduct did but testify the fruitlessness of Divine grace when acting upon a will obstinately set upon evil.

The immediate occasion of his rejection was his failing under a specific trial of his obedience, as set before him at the very time he was anointed. He had collected with difficulty an army against the Philistines: while waiting for Samuel to offer the sacrifice, his people became dispirited, and began to fall off and return home. Here he was doubtless exposed to the temptation of taking unlawful measures to put a stop to their defection. But when we consider that the act to which he was persuaded was no less than that of his offering sacrifice—he being neither priest nor prophet, nor having any commission thus to interfere with the Mosaic ritual—it is plain "his *forcing himself*" to do so (as he tenderly described his sin) was a direct profaneness—a profaneness which implied that he was careless about forms, which in this world will ever be essential to things supernatural, and thought it mattered little whether he acted in God's way or in his own.

After this, he seems to have separated himself from Samuel, whom he found unwilling to become his instrument, and to have had recourse to the priesthood instead. Ahijah

or Ahimelech (as he is afterwards called), the high priest, followed his camp; and the ark too, in spite of the warning conveyed by the disasters which attended the presumptuous use of it in the time of Eli. "And Saul said unto Ahijah, Bring hither the ark of God"; while it was brought, a tumult which was heard in the camp of the Philistines, increased. On this interruption Saul irreverently put the ark aside, and went out to the battle.

It will be observed, that there was no professed or intentional irreverence in Saul's conduct; he was still on the whole the same he had ever been. He outwardly respected the Mosaic ritual—about this time he built his first altar to the Lord, and in a certain sense seemed to acknowledge God's authority. But nothing shows he considered that there was any vast distinction between Israel and the nations around them. He was *indifferent*, and cared for none of these things. The chosen people desired a king like the nations, and such a one they received.

After this he was commanded to "go and smite the sinners, the Amalekites, and utterly destroy them and their cattle." This was a judgment on them which God had long decreed, though He had delayed it; and He now made Saul the minister of His vengeance. But Saul performed it so far only as fell in with his own inclination and purposes. He smote, indeed, the Amalekites, and "destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword"—this exploit had its glory; the best of the flocks and herds he spared, and why? to sacrifice therewith to the Lord. But since God had expressly told him to destroy them, what was this but to imply, that Divine intimations had nothing to do with such matters? what was it but to consider that the established religion was but a useful institution, or a splendid pageant suitable to the dignity of monarchy, but resting on no unseen supernatural sanction? Certainly he in no sense acted in the fear of God, with the wish to please Him, and the conviction that he was in His sight. He "feared the people and obeyed their voice." Again, he spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites. Doubtless he considered Agag as "his brother," as Ahab afterwards called Ben-hadad. Agag was a king, and Saul observed towards him that courtesy and clemency which earthly monarchs observe one towards another, and rightly, when no Divine command comes in the way. But the God of Israel required a king after His own heart, jealous of idolatry; the people had desired a king like the nations around them.

It is remarkable, moreover, that while he spared Agag, he attempted to exterminate the Gibeonites with the sword, who were tolerated in Israel by virtue of an oath taken in their favour by Joshua and "the princes of the congregation." This he did "*in his zeal* to the children of Israel and Judah."

From the time of his disobedience in the matter of Amalek, Samuel came no more to see Saul, whose season of probation was over. The evil spirit exerted a more visible influence upon him; and God sent Samuel to anoint David privately, as the future king of Israel. I need not trace further the course of moral degradation which is exemplified in Saul's subsequent history. His injurious treatment of David is a long history; but his conduct to Ahimelech, the high priest, admits of being mentioned here. Ahimelech assisted David in his escape. Saul resolved on the death of Ahimelech and all his father's house. On his guards refusing to execute his command, Doeg, a man of Edom, one of the nations which Saul was raised up to withstand, undertook the atrocious deed. On that day, eighty-five priests were slain. Afterwards Nob, the city of the priests, was smitten with the edge of the sword, and all destroyed, "men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses and sheep." That is, Saul executed more complete vengeance on the descendants of Levi, the sacred tribe, than on the sinners, the Amalekites, who laid wait for Israel in the way, on their going up from Egypt.

Last of all, he finishes his bad history by an open act of apostasy from the God of Israel. His last act is like his first, but more significant. He began, as we saw, by consulting Samuel as a diviner; this showed the direction of his mind. It steadily persevered in its evil way—and he ends by consulting a professed sorceress at Endor. The Philistines had assembled their hosts; Saul's heart trembled greatly—he had no advisers or comforters; Samuel was dead—the priests he had himself slain with the sword. He hoped, by magic rites, which he had formerly denounced, to foresee the issue of the approaching battle. God meets him even in the cave of Satanic delusions—but as an Antagonist. The reprobate king receives, by the mouth of dead Samuel, who had once anointed him, the news that he is to be "taken away in God's wrath"—that the Lord would deliver Israel, with him, into the hands of the Philistines, and that on the morrow he and his sons should be numbered with the dead.

The next day "the battle went sore against him, the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers." "Anguish came upon him," and he feared to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised. He desired his armour-bearer to draw his sword and thrust him through therewith. On his refusing, he fell upon his own sword, and so came to his end.

Unbelief and wilfulness are the wretched characteristics of Saul's history—an ear deaf to the plainest commands, a heart hardened against the most gracious influences. Do not suppose, my brethren, because I speak thus strongly, I consider Saul's state of mind to be something very unusual. God forbid it should exist in its full misery any where among us! but surely there is not any one soul here present but what may trace in itself the elements of sins like this. Let us only reflect on our hardness of heart when attending religious ordinances, and we shall understand something of Saul's condition when he prophesied. We may be conscious to ourselves of the truth of things sacred as entirely as if we saw them; we may have no misgivings about the presence of God in Church, or about the grace of the Sacraments, and yet we often feel in as ordinary and as unconcerned a mood as if we were altogether unbelievers. Again, let us reflect on our callousness after mercies received, or after suffering. We are often in worse case even than this; for to realize the unseen world in our imagination, and feel as if we saw it, may not always be in our power. But what shall be said to wilful transgression of God's commandments, such as most of us, I fear, must recollect in ourselves, even as children, when our hearts were most tender, when we least doubted about religion, were least perplexed in matters of duty, and had all the while a full consciousness of what we were doing? What, again, shall be said to those, perhaps not few in number, who sin with the purpose beforehand of repenting afterwards?

What makes our insensibility still more alarming is, that it follows the grant of the highest privileges. Saul was hardened after the Spirit of God had come on him; ours is a sin after Baptism. There is something awful in this, if we understood it; as if that peculiar hardness of heart which we experience, in spite of whatever excellences of character we may otherwise possess, like Saul—in spite of the benevolence, or fairness, or candour, or consideration, which are the virtues of this age—was the characteristic of a soul transgressing after it had "tasted the powers of the world to come," and an earnest of the second death. May this thought, through God's mercy, rouse us to a deeper seriousness than we have at present, while Christ still continues to intercede for us, and grants us time for repentance!

Saul

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen," etc.—1 Samuel x. 24.

In Saul we feel that there is a marked advance made in the Jewish history—from the patriarchal and nomadic state, which concerns us mainly by its contrast with our own, to that fixed and settled which has more or less pervaded the whole condition of the Church ever since. Saul was the first King of Israel, and in him that new and strange idea became impersonated.

But, although in outward form Saul belonged to the new epoch, although even in spirit he from time to time threw himself into it, yet in the whole he is a product of the earlier condition. Whilst Samuel's existence comprehends and overlaps both periods in the calmness of a higher elevation, the career of Saul derives its peculiar interest from the fact that it is the eddy in which both streams converge. In that vortex he struggles—the centre of events and persons greater than himself; and in that struggle he is borne down, and lost. It is the pathetic interest which has more than once suggested the story of Saul as a subject for the modern drama.

His character is in part illustrated by the fierce, wayward, fitful nature of the tribe (Benjamin), and in part accounted for, by the struggle between the old and the new systems in which he found himself involved. To this we must add a taint of madness, which broke out in violent frenzy at times, leaving him with long lucid intervals. His affections were strong, as appears in his love both for David and his son Jonathan, but

they were unequal to the wild excesses of religious zeal or insanity which ultimately led to his ruin. He was, like the earlier Judges, remarkable for his strength and activity, and he was, like the Homeric heroes, of gigantic stature, taller by head and shoulders than the rest of the people, and of that kind of beauty denoted by the Hebrew word "good," and which caused him to be compared to the gazelle, "the gazelle of Israel." It was probably these external qualifications which led to the epithet which is frequently attached to his name, "chosen," whom the Lord did choose," "See you him whom the Lord hath chosen!"

From the household of Abiel, of the tribe of Benjamin, two sons were born, related to each other, either as cousins, or as uncle and nephew. The elder was Abner, the younger was Saul.

It is uncertain in what precise spot of the territory of that fierce tribe the original seat of the family lay. It may have been the conical eminence amongst its central hills, known from its subsequent connexion with him as Gibeah-of-Saul. It was more probably the village of Zelah, on its extreme southern frontier, in which was the ancestral burial-place. Although the family itself was of small importance, Kish, the son or grandson of Abiel, was regarded as a powerful and wealthy chief; and it is in connection with the determination to recover his lost property that his son Saul first appears before us.

A drove of asses, still the cherished animal of the Israelite chiefs, had gone astray on the mountains. In search of them—by pathways of which every stage is mentioned, as if to mark the importance of the journey, but which have not yet been identified—Saul wandered at his father's bidding, accompanied by a trustworthy servant, who acted as guide and guardian of the young man. After a three days' circuit, they arrived at the foot of a hill surmounted by a town, when Saul proposed to return home, but was deterred by the advice of the servant, who suggested that before doing so they should consult "a man of God," a "seer," as to the fate of the asses, securing his oracle by present of a quarter of a silver shekel. They were instructed by the maidens at the well outside the city to catch the seer as he came out of the city to ascend to a sacred eminence, where a sacrificial feast was waiting for his benediction. At the gate they met the Seer for the first time. It was Samuel. A Divine intimation had indicated to him the approach and the future destiny of the youthful Benjamite. Surprised at his language, but still obeying his call, they ascended to the high place, and in the inn or caravanserai at the top found thirty or seventy guests assembled, amongst whom they took the chief seats. In anticipation of some distinguished stranger, Samuel had bade the cook reserve a boiled shoulder, from which Saul, as the chief guest, was bidden to tear off the first morsel. They then descended to the city, and a bed was prepared for Saul on the house-top. At day-break Samuel aroused him. They descended again to the skirts of the town, and there (the servant having left them) Samuel poured over Saul's head the consecrated oil, and with a kiss of salutation announced to him that he was to be the ruler and deliverer of the nation. From that moment, as he turned on Samuel the huge shoulder which towered above all the rest, a new life dawned upon him. Under the outward garb of his domestic vocation, the new destiny had been thrust upon him. The trivial forms of an antiquated phase of religion had been the means of introducing him to the Prophet of the Future. Each stage of his returning, as of his outgoing route, is marked with the utmost exactness, and at each stage he meets the incidents which, according to Samuel's prediction, were to mark his coming fortunes. By the sepulchre of his mighty ancestress—known then, and known still, as Rachel's tomb—he met two men, who announced to him the recovery of the asses. There his lower cares were to cease. By a venerable oak—distinguished by the name not elsewhere given, "the oak of Tabor"—he met three men carrying gifts of kids and bread, and a skin of wine, as an offering to Bethel. There, as if to indicate his new dignity, two of the loaves were offered to him. By "the Hill of God," whatever may be meant thereby, possibly his own city, Gibeah, he met a band of Prophets descending with musical instruments, and he caught the inspiration from them, as a sign of a grander, loftier life, than he had ever before conceived.

This is what may be called the private inner view of his call. There was yet another outer call, which is related independently. An assembly was convened by Samuel at Mizpeh, and lots were cast to find the tribe and the family which was to produce the king. Saul was named—and, by a Divine intimation, found hid in the circle of baggage which surrounded the encampment. His nature at once conciliated the public feeling, and

for the first time the shout was raised, afterwards so often repeated in modern times, "Long live the king." The monarchy, with that conflict of tendencies, of which the mind of Samuel was the best reflex, was established in the person of the young Prophet, whom he had thus called to his perilous eminence.

Up to this point Saul had only been the shy and retiring youth of the family. He is employed in the common work of the farm. His father, when he delays his return, mourns for him, as having lost his way. He hangs on the servant for directions as to what he shall do, which he would not have known himself. At every step of Samuel's revelations he is taken by surprise. "Am not I a Benjamite? of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore, then, speakest thou so to me?" He turns his huge shoulder on Samuel, apparently still unconscious of what awaits him. The last thing which those who knew him in former days can expect, is, that Saul should be among the prophets. Long afterwards the memorial of this unaptness for high aspirations remained enshrined in the national proverbs. Even after the change had come upon him, he still shrank from the destiny which was opening before him. "Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto thee. And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not." On the day of his election, he was nowhere to be found, and he was as though he were deaf. Some there were who even after his appointment still said, "How shall this man save us?" "and they brought him no presents." And he shrank back into private life, and was in his fields and with his yoke of oxen.

But there was one distinction which marked out Saul for his future office. "The desire of all Israel" was already, unconsciously, "on him and on his father's house." He had the one gift by which in that primitive time a man seemed to be worthy of rule. He was "goodly," "there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he," "from his shoulder and upward, he towered above all the people." His stately, towering form, standing under the pomegranate tree above the precipice of Migron, or on the pointed crags of Michmash, on the rocks of En-gedi, claimed for him the title of the "wild roe, the gazelle," perched aloft, "the pride and glory of Israel." Against the giant Philistines a giant king was needed. And "when Saul saw any *strong* man or any *valiant* man he took him unto him." King as he is, we might fancy ourselves still in the days of Shamgar or of Gideon, when we see him following his herd of oxen in the field, and driving them home at the close of the day up the steep ascent of the city.

It was on one of these evening returns that his career received the next sharp stimulus which drove him on to his destined work. A loud wail, such as goes up in an Eastern city at the tidings of some great calamity, strikes his ear. He said, "What aileth the people that they weep?" They told him the news that had reached them from their kinsmen beyond the Jordan. The work which Jephthah had wrought in that wild region had to be done over again. Ammon was advancing, and the first victims were the inhabitants of Jabesh, connected by the romantic adventure of the previous generation with the tribe of Benjamin. This one spark of outraged family feeling was needed to awaken the dormant spirit of the sluggish giant. He was the true Benjaminite from first to last. "The Spirit of God came upon him" as on Samson. His shy retiring nature vanished. His anger flamed out, and he took two oxen from the herd that he was driving, and (here again, in accordance with the like expedient in that earlier time, only in a somewhat gentler form) he hewed them in pieces and sent the bones through the country with the significant warning, "Whosoever cometh not after Saul, and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen." An awe fell upon the people; they rose as one man. In one day they crossed the Jordan. Jabesh was rescued. It was the deliverance of his own tribe, which thus at once seated him on the throne securely. The east of the Jordan was regarded as specially the conquest of Saul. The house of Jabesh never forgot their debt of gratitude.

This was his first great victory. The monarchy was inaugurated afresh. But he still so far resembles the earlier judges as to be virtually king only within his own tribe.

Samuel, who had up to this time been still named as ruler with Saul, now withdrew, and Saul became the acknowledged chief. In the second year of his reign, he began to organise an attempt to shake off the Philistine yoke which pressed on his country; not least on his own tribe, where a Philistine officer had long been stationed, even in his own field (1 Sam. x. 5; xiii. 3). An army of 3,000 was formed, which he soon afterwards gathered together around him; and Jonathan, apparently with his sanction, rose against

the officer and slew him. This roused the whole force of the Philistine nation against him. The spirit of Israel was completely broken. Many concealed themselves in the caverns; many crossed the Jordan; all were disarmed, except Saul and his son, with their immediate retainers. In this crisis, Saul, now on the very confines of his kingdom at Gilgal, found himself in the position long before described by Samuel—longing to exercise his royal right of sacrifice, yet deterred by his sense of obedience to the Prophet. At last on the seventh day, he could wait no longer, but just after the sacrifice was completed Samuel arrived, and pronounced the first curse, on his impetuous zeal (1 Sam. xiii. 5-14). Meanwhile the adventurous exploit of Jonathan, at Michmash brought on the crisis which ultimately drove the Philistines back to their own territory. It was signalised by two remarkable incidents in the life of Saul. One was the first appearance of his madness in the rash vow which all but cost the life of his son. The other was the erection of his first altar, built either to celebrate the victory, or to expiate the savage feast of the famished people (1 Sam. xiv. 35). The expulsion of the Philistines (although not entirely completed) at once placed Saul in a position higher than that of any previous ruler of Israel. Probably from this time was formed the organization of royal state, which contained in germ some of the future institutions of the monarchy. The host of 3,000 had been already mentioned. Of this Abner became captain. A body guard was also formed of runners and messengers. Of this David was afterwards made the chief. These two were the principal officers of the court, and sat with Jonathan at the king's table. Another officer is incidentally mentioned—the keeper of the royal mules—the “constable” of the king—such as appears in the later monarchy. He is the first instance of a foreigner employed about the court—being an Edomite, or Syrian, of the name of Doeg. According to Jewish tradition he was the servant who accompanied Saul in his pursuit of his father's asses—who counselled him to send for David—and whose son ultimately killed him. The high-priest of the house of Ithamar (Ahimelech) was in attendance upon him with the ephod, when he desired it (1 Sam. xiv. 3), and felt himself bound to assist his secret commissioners (*ib.* xxi. 1-9; xxii. 14).

The King himself was distinguished by a state, not before marked in the rulers. He had a tall spear, of the same kind as that described in the hand of Goliath. This never left him—in repose; at his meals; at rest; in battle. In battle he wore a diadem on his head, and a bracelet on his arm. He sat at meals on a seat of his own, facing his son. He was received on his return from battle by the songs of the Israelite women, amongst whom he was on such occasions specially known as bringing back from the enemy scarlet robes, and golden ornaments for their apparel.

The warlike character of his reign naturally still predominated, and he was now able (not merely, like his temporary predecessors, to act on the defensive, but) to attack the neighbouring tribes of Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobah, and finally Amalek. The war with Amalek is twice related, first briefly in 1 Sam. xiv. 48, and then at length in xv. 1-9. Its chief connection with Saul's history lies in the disobedience to the prophetic command of Samuel; shown in the sparing of the King, and the retention of the spoil. This second act of disobedience called down the second curse, and the first distinct intimation of the transference of the kingdom to a rival. The struggle between Samuel and Saul in their final parting is indicated by the rent of Samuel's robe of state, as he tears himself away from Saul's grasp, and by the long mourning of Samuel for the separation—“Samuel mourned for Saul.” “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?”

The rest of Saul's life is one long tragedy. The frenzy, which had given indication of itself before, now at times took almost entire possession of him. It is described in mixed phrases as “an evil spirit of God,” (much as we might speak of “religious madness”), which, when it came upon him, almost choked or strangled him from its violence.

In this crisis David was recommended to him by one of the young men of his guard (in the Jewish tradition groundlessly supposed to be Doeg). From this time forward their lives are blended together. In Saul's better moments he never lost the strong affection which he had contracted for David. “He loved him greatly.” “Saul would let him go no more home to his father's house.” “Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat?” “Is this thy voice, my son David . . . Return my son David; blessed be thou, my son David.” Occasionally too his prophetic gift returned, blended with his madness. He “prophesied” or “raved” in the midst of his house—“he prophesied and lay down naked all day and all night,” at Ramah. But his acts of fierce, wild zeal increased. The massacre of the priests, with all their families—the massacre, perhaps at the same time, of the Gibeonites, and the violent extirpation of the necro-

mancers, are all of the same kind. At last the monarchy itself, which he had raised up, broke down under the weakness of its head. The Philistines re-entered the country, and with their chariots and horses re-occupied the plain of Esdraelon. Their camp was pitched on the southern slope of the range now called Little Hermon, by Shunem. On the opposite side, on Mount Gilboa, was the Israelite army, clinging as usual to the heights which were their safety. It was near the spring of Gideon's encampment, hence called the spring of Harod or "trembling," and now the name assumed an evil omen, and the heart of the King as he pitched his camp there "trembled exceedingly." In the loss of all the usual means of consulting the Divine will, he determined, with that mixture of superstition and religion which marked his whole career, to apply to one of the necromancers who had escaped his persecution. She was a woman, living at Endor, on the other side of Little Hermon. According to the Hebrew tradition mentioned by Jerome she was the mother of Abner, and hence her escape from the general massacre of the necromancers. Volumes have been written on the question, whether in the scene that follows, we are to understand an imposture or a real apparition of Samuel.

The obvious meaning of the narrative itself tends to the hypothesis of some kind of apparition. She recognises the disguised king first by the appearance of Samuel, seemingly from his threatening aspect or tone as towards his enemy. Saul apparently saw nothing, but listened to her description of a god-like figure of an aged man, wrapped round with the royal or sacred robe. On hearing the denunciation, which the apparition conveyed, Saul felt the whole length of his gigantic stature on the ground, and remained motionless till the woman and his servants forced him to eat.

The next day the battle came on, and according to Josephus, perhaps according to the spirit of the sacred narrative, his courage and self-devotion returned. The Israelites were driven up the side of Gilboa. The three sons of Saul were slain. Saul himself with his armour-bearer was pursued by the archers and the charioteers of the enemy. He was wounded in the stomach. His shield was cast away. According to one account, he fell upon his own sword. According to another account (which may be reconciled with the former by supposing that it describes a later incident), an Amalekite came up at the moment of his death-wound, (whether from himself or the enemy), and found him "fallen," but leaning on his spear. The dizziness of death was gathered over him, but he was still alive; and he was at his own request, put out of his pain by the Amalekite, who took off his royal diadem and bracelet, and carried the news to David.

Not till then, according to Josephus, did the faithful armour-bearer fall on his sword and die with him. The body on being found by the Philistines was stripped, and decapitated. The armour was sent into the Philistines' cities, as if in retribution for the spoliation of Goliath, and finally deposited in the temple of Astarte, apparently in the neighbouring Canaanitish city of Bethshan; and over the walls of the same city was hung, the naked headless corpse, with those of his three sons. The head was deposited (probably at Ashdod) in the temple of Dagon—1 Chron. x. 10. The corpse was removed from Bethshan by the gratitude of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead who came over the Jordan by night, carried off the bodies, burnt them, and buried them under the tamarisk at Jabesh. Thence, after the lapse of several years, his ashes, and those of Jonathan were removed by David to their ancestral sepulchre at Zelah in Benjamin.

Saul

BY REV. GEORGE SHEPARD.

"Is Saul also among the prophets?"—1 Samuel x. 11.

This, we are told, passed to be a proverb. It was originally uttered by the people, as an expression of their surprise at seeing Saul with a professed company, engaging in religious duties, in the utterances of devotion and praise. Afterward, when any one was seen suddenly, and contrary to the previous habit, in religious connections, and, with seeming heartiness, religiously employed, this proverb leaped forth, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

The words of my text introduce us only to his religious character; and in this he represents a large class, found in every age,—perhaps never more plenty than now; a very

large class marked by a certain type of experience. For the better understanding of this subject, let us turn to the religious character of Saul, marking the occasions, the causes, the qualities of it.

The first developments of the character were bursts of devotion, the utterance of thankful praise.

We are to take into account, as in part the reason of this religious development in Saul, a peculiarly susceptible nature,—a nature that made short turns, quickly variant in its moods, relieving itself by starts and bursts. This appears in his conduct in the cave, in his savage hunt of David. At one moment there was the fury of murderous passion; then, under the sign of David's filial and forbearing love, a perfect tumult of tenderness: "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept." Then what words of conciliation and entreaty followed. Some have doubted as to the antiquity of nerves. I think it quite evident that they are as old, at least, as Saul. This seems to have been his order of temperament. Hence his quick turns and susceptibilities, his ups and downs, his brief sunshines, his longer and deeper glooms.

In the beginning, there was an admirable self-distrust and humility, that greatness and dignity of soul which does not allow itself to be lifted up by sudden prosperity. Ordinarily, it would be enough to turn the head of a country youth to precipitate a kingdom upon him. But with what strange reserve and meekness did Saul bear this great honour. He shrunk from speaking of it even to his familiar friends. And when the hour for the inauguration came, and all were gathered to witness the pomp and the ceremony, the elect monarch, on whom all eyes were eager to feast, had, in his excess of modesty, hid himself among the stuff. And, after the recognition and the formal setting apart, he went back to his old home, to the care of his cattle; showing, in connection with this, not only his humility, but the noble quality of clemency; interposing, as he did, to spare certain ones guilty of insult to him, whom the people would have summarily despatched but for Saul's interceding grace. And not only humility and mercy, but worship, sacrifice; evidently a marked fervour in the utterances of devotion, and pretty certainly a uniformity, a steadfastness, in his devotions. The religious rite or service he seemed very unwilling to neglect or put by; on one occasion refusing the risks of battle till he had gathered around himself and his army the shield of the Divine favour, which comes of observing the prayer and the sacrifice.

But the material bearing on the favourable side of Saul's character is exceedingly scant. It all dwindles down pretty much to one item; namely, that he stood strictly for the observances of religion. So far as the Kingdom of God was in form, Saul went pertinaciously with it. After a little while we find that all his scrupulousness was for the form, the triviality. He ordained a fast when the salvation of the kingdom depended on the strength which comes of food. He was for putting his patriot son to death for a sin of ignorance, that was no sin at all,—only this, that a senseless vow had been infringed; and he spared the Amalekites, brought under sentence of death by God for their sins, and he himself commissioned and sent as their executioner,—in the face of the commission and the command he spared them. He could not forego, on one occasion, the offering of sacrifice,—so very religious was he; but he could trample down God's rule and authority, in arrogating to himself the priest's function, in order that he might do it. Again, he went directly contrary to God's specific and solemn word,—taking upon him to keep alive what God had commanded him to destroy: still, only in small part did he save what was thus doomed. Soon the Prophet comes, and the king advances to meet him, saying, I have performed the commandment of the Lord, except that a few of the best cattle are reserved for sacrifice,—his damning formalism here obtruding again, to be rebuked on the spot with a scathing force of words, enough, we should think, to have wilted it down for the ages, never more to rise again: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

This religion of Saul, being very much in the expression and form, was a religion of appearance,—stood more for the appearance with man, than for the reality before God. Hence his impassioned cry to Samuel, when the Prophet was wrenching himself away: "I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel; and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God." His kingly standing, his reputation with the people, was first with him,—not God's judgment of him.

The defect of Saul's religion, we see, lay in the temper and habit of his heart, and in the spirit of his obedience: the heart not right, the obedience not thorough and entire.

There are two kinds of piety, which may be described as the Regressive and the Progressive. The first is not valid; its more common sign being from seeming good to bad, and from bad to worse, though not always, perhaps not commonly, running into downright immorality. The other is sound; and its sign is growth, advance from good to better, and on to the perfect. Passing the more genial and pleasant topic, I propose, at the present, to draw what light and quickening we may from the gloom and the deadliness gathered in the other.

The Regressive in piety,—there is such a character. Oh how frequently found. How many, who, for a time, were in the prophesying ranks, in the prayer-meeting, the assemblies of worship and praise, interested, and uttering that interest: but not now. Ye began and did run well seemingly; then came the reverse step. Are there not those here to-day before whose minds these remarks call up a vivid passage of their lives? And I venture to say you then pronounced it the best, the happiest passage. Oh how happy, if it only had held on. How sad, as it is now going with you. How sad, that so blessed a beginning should, almost at the threshold, have been swallowed up in abortion. How sad, I imagine, some of your thoughts, in the still, retrospective hour; and sadder yet, in the dread foreboding hour. How sad, when you come to the end and to your reckoning with God, to hear your doom from His lips.

Think of Saul's course, written out for your warning,—his early and blushing honours, and dawning hopes; then his faltering distrust, his politic disobedience; then his gloominess, his soul-laceration, his spasms of frantic agony, his enmity, his malignity, despair,—the God Who once heard hearing him no more; then the crowning daring, of a resort to the spirit-world, and thence coming the mutter of his destiny; and in that, the finish and climax of his soul's horror, the symbol of what succeeded, the soul's self-destruction, consummate and eternal.

"Some of you," said Dr. Chalmers, in one of his grand and dissecting strains,—“some of you have heard of the individual who, under the oppression of melancholy, seeking counsel of his physician, was advised by him to attend the performances of a comedian who had put all the world into ecstasies. But it turned out, that the patient was himself the comedian. And, whilst his smile was to all the signal of merriment, his heart stood uncheered and begrimed before the gratulations of the applauding multitude, evening after evening, a poor, helpless, stricken mourner, amid the tumults of the high-sounding gaiety himself had created.” Whilst the Kingdom of God is in power, there is a simulation of it in word only; and so well simulated, that, if you do not go below the words, you cannot tell the difference. But, if you go down to the silent and salient centre of the man, there is a difference world wide. It is where Saul did not go, and where none of his type at this day go. He consecrated himself to a certain extent, and so far became religious as to pray, praise, prophesy, go to meeting, observe the forms. And so far he stood to it. But the outer cuticle and the remotest fibre of his selfishness was not touched by all this; though he was sincere in it all, very likely, and thought quite well of himself, with his nice outside dress of religion, and his silken, ribbony words, venturing to say, “I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” And it came back from the Prophet like a shaft of granite whelming him, “What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” It means that the sheep and the oxen are left out of his bill of consecration. What his soul's selfishness craved he kept for himself,—all of that he kept for himself. And this is the core of the difficulty, the inmost centre of his rottenness. And right here, let me say, abides the vitiating defect now. The sheep, the oxen, the logs, the stocks, the moneys,—whatever will contribute to the gratification and the pride of life,—is left wholly out, I fear, of many and many a pretended Christian consecration.

My friends, there is a chapter here, in our professedly religious doings and not doings, which it frightens me to think of looking at the headings and titles of. The man comes well attired, grave, in good seeming to make the offer of himself to God in the house of God; when that same God sees and knows, that at least nine-tenths of all he solidly values and vigorously lives for is outside of the pale of his consecration. The safe iron box is at home, under his own key and keeping. He means it shall be, and probably it will be. I tremble on account of our superficialness. I include myself in this remark, and personally tremble; and pray God to probe down into us, and so fetch us nearer to His own standard, to the making our all over to Him. We can have no assurance as Christians till we do this. The probability is against us that we are Christians, if we know this and do it not.

And let there be the repentings and humiliations for past shortcomings. Let us come before God for these things, and deal directly with God, as Saul did not do. He confessed to David and to Samuel, and begged forgiveness of the Prophet,—none from God; showing by this that he had no thought or sense of the enormity of his guilt. May God help us to thoroughness. May His law come home to us, that we may know, in the phrase of President Edwards, “the infinite upon infinite of our sin”; and then let us not faint or despair, but, knowing the Saviour revealed, His boundless compassion, and His unlimited capacity and reach of forgiveness through His sacrifice and blood, let us go to Him, and in faith cast all upon His mercy; and in truth devote all to His service in a spirit of wholeness and in a rigour of fidelity that will never retract and never falter.

Saul

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

“But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul,” etc.—1 Samuel xvi. 14.

Saul had every thing which the natural man could desire. Gifted in mind and body,—“See ye him,” said Samuel, “whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him.” He was a “choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he; from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.” The Spirit of God moreover was given him to fit him for his kingdom at that anointing. And the anointing was to him “the oil of gladness”; for the Prophet himself delighted in him; and God turned the hearts of the people towards him, so that, on the day of his institution, “Saul,” it is said, “and all the people rejoiced greatly.” The pride of the people—the chosen of God—and having in him qualities that even endeared him throughout to the wisest and best of men; but more than this, for even in those things in which he afterwards fell—disobedience and pride of heart,—he has at first the testimony of God for good; for the Lord says to Samuel, “Saul is turned back from following Me”; he had therefore once followed obediently the guidance of God. And Samuel says to him, “When thou wast little in thine own sight”; so that he once was humble of mind. But now he rejoices in himself, not in God; and there arises in him that self-elation which goes before a fall; “the beginning of pride is when one departeth from God”; “for pride is the beginning of sin.” The trial which comes does not occasion this self-confidence and rising of the heart against God, but brings out and proves that which was in the soul.

At the time of anointing him king, Samuel gave him the injunction to go down before him to Gilgal, and there to wait seven days till he himself should come to offer the sacrifices and burnt offerings. This, though he knew it not, was to be the proof of Saul’s faith; this would show whether he trusted in himself or in God, whether he could wait for God and upon God. What appeared an accidental urgency of circumstances was wisely calculated for this probation. The case seemed pressing; the appointed time just transpiring; the people were scattered; the Philistines were coming on; what could be more religious than Saul’s anxiety at such a time for supplication and for sacrifice? Thus, as the Jews afterwards, he deceived himself with religion; but the heart and life of religion, faith, was wanting; for what was the use of supplication and sacrifice? were they not to obtain God’s assistance? but could not God assist without them? “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord,” was the very pledge of deliverance given by Moses at the Red Sea. Thus Saul becomes a sign of the taking away of the kingdom from Israel. It is the opposite to the obedience of the Son of God. “Sacrifice and meat-offering Thou wouldest not; but Mine ears hast Thou opened.” “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God!” “Yea, Thy law is within My heart.” “Thou hast done foolishly,” said Samuel, “thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God. Thy kingdom shall not continue; the Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart,” even him whose saying is, “I waited patiently for the Lord.” “My soul, wait thou still,” i.e., calm and patient, “upon God.”

“Woe unto them that have lost patience.” “Patient abiding,” “possessing the soul in patience,” “patient waiting for the Lord,” are ever spoken of as the part of acceptable faith in the last days; when they that fall away shall say in their heart, as Saul did of Samuel, the Prophet of God, “My Lord delayeth His coming.”

Thus was he weighed in the balance and found wanting. As with Uzziah, that other king who invaded the Priest's office, the secret leprosy of sin rose up to his forehead, and the subtle contagion of that pride filled all his body and clave to him to the last.

Then comes the second trial, when Samuel reminds him of his anointing, and sends him utterly to destroy Amalek; but Saul again is more merciful than the all-merciful God, more religious than the holy Samuel. He spares Agag, and he saves the best of the spoil to offer sacrifice to God; thus he blinds himself in his disobedience with a show of clemency and religion. "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." For obedience is the sacrifice of the soul itself to God, which is better than that of slain beasts; it is the offering up of the will itself.

But the state of Saul's heart appears still more strongly in his shadow of repentance than in his sin itself. He confesses, "I have sinned"; but this confession is not accompanied with humiliation before God, and in consequence a willingness to be humbled before men; on the contrary, he seeks his own honour, not that of God, with this confession on his lips. "I have sinned, yet honour me, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord." Here we have the very spirit of the Pharisees, loving the praise of man more than the praise of God, and of the rejected Israel when the Gospel was preached. Even in the worship of God Saul seeks his own honour; whereas David in doing service to God says, "I will yet be more vile than this; and will be base in mine own sight." David said, "I have sinned against the Lord"; and Nathan answered, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Saul says, "I have sinned"; but "Samuel," it is added, "came no more to see Saul until the day of his death"; "and it repented the Lord that He had made Saul king over Israel."

From this commences a new phase in the history, as deeply impressive, as sadly affecting as any thing can be—the downward course of a man who hath departed from God in his heart. "Lo, this is the man that took not God for his strength"; yet for a while "I have seen him in great power, and flourishing like a green bay-tree." But now, in the awful words of the text, "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." And it is the harp of David that soothes the unhappy king. "He was refreshed," it is added, "and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." And yet more, he "greatly loved David," the minstrel. Here we have all the natural goodness of Saul, which renders his fall so awful and affecting. What great virtues had he shown had his heart been but right with God. He had been generous to his enemies, who had refused allegiance to him; he had been heroic-minded, yielding up his son Jonathan to die. David's pathetic lamentation over him at his death shows that Saul was no ordinary character, to have engaged such love and kept it throughout. It required a voice from God Himself to awaken Samuel from his grief for one so loved and honoured; the kiss of love he had given at his anointing continued in Samuel's affection to the end. And the "mountains of Gilboa" bore witness to the rare affection of a father and son, as "lovely in their lives," and "in their death not divided."

And now the "evil spirit from the Lord" troubles him, and though driven away for a time, finds access into his heart, and brings with him all malice and misery. He had disobeyed God, obeying the people; he had listened to the people's voice, not to that of God; and therefore when another is in the praise of the people the evil spirit hath with envy filled his heart. "The women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wrath, and the saying displeased him." "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." David had been his aid in need; had subdued for him the Philistines; had comforted him from the evil spirit; but his love is turned into hate; the fire of hell is kindled in his bosom, and makes visible the darkness of that heart wherein once was the light of God's countenance.

Again and again he attempts to slay him: more than once by his own hand; and by means of his messengers; and through the Philistines. But all in vain, for he is fighting against God. And now all things around him that should have been otherwise his delight and glory, are turned to gall and wormwood, the poison of his soul. All his friends around him are hateful to him because they love one whom God loves. "All of you," he says, "have conspired against me." "There is none of you that is sorry for me." Doubtless all were grieved for him, but none could heal that malady which was in his own soul. Who can give peace to him who is not at peace with God? All the love which there is around him but adds to his own envy and misery; and that which charity

would have made his delight and joy, has now become food for the never-dying worm which is in his bosom. God Himself hath set His love on the man after His own heart; Israel and Judah love him; his own daughter loves him; and his own son above all; and the priests of God favour him; and the consequence of this is, that Saul in all his prosperity is more distressed than Job in all his afflictions. Possessing all things, yet having nothing; while David in single-hearted faith is as having nothing, yet possessing all things. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

How strange and impressive is now the narrative, while David with love answers the enmity and hate of Saul! And very striking is the description, when twice overcome by David's sparing his life when it was in his power, he relents and is softened for a time; but only for a time; for the evil spirit within him has become too powerful, has taken up his abode and will not be dislodged. "And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." He even prays for him, "wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day." Who could have supposed that Saul after he had thus spoken, should yet again pursue David as he had done before; and should again have his life spared by him in the same manner, and make the like confession of his unreasonable hate and sin; and that yet notwithstanding, David's life should be no more safe with him than it had been before? "Behold," he says, "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." "Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt do great things and still prevail."

O miserable state, to be thus hunted and haunted by the evil which in his better moments he deplores! he is like two persons, his better self, and the evil one within him, contending and struggling together for awhile, till they become both one. And thus at length, while he yields to the evil spirit, he shuts up against himself the mercies and loving-kindness of God, and is cast out from His presence. For now the time of real distress and trouble comes upon him, and he feels the approach of the King of Terrors. "And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by Prophets." And now, O strange and sad reverse, the Anointed of God, the Hope of Israel, lies stretched on the ground in the witch's cave! Alas, indeed! it would seem as if the evil spirit were looking through his prison bars and mocking him throughout with his false pretences to goodness, with semblances and counterparts of his former sins and inconsistencies. "Thou renewest Thy witnesses against me." He that would spare the cruel Agag will not spare the merciful David; he that was so careful of sacrifice slays eighty and five innocent Priests of God in his wrath against David; he who saved the best from the Amalekites to sacrifice to the Lord his God, afterwards falls upon the Priests; and "Nob, the city of the Priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword." In "his zeal for Israel and Judah," he broke the covenant they had made, and slew the Gibeonites whom Joshua spared, till their blood called aloud to God. He who would have the kingdom perpetuated in his own house, attempts to slay his own son on whom that house depended, because he loved the heir of the kingdom whom God had chosen. He who cared so much for the people's voice, now hates the sound of that voice because it is with David. He who in his zeal for God had put away all the witches from out of Israel, is now by her of Endor lifted up from the dust and comforted. Unseasonably and against God he spared the Amalekite, and by the hands of an Amalekite he himself dies.

Jonathan

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"Jonathan, Saul's son."—1 Samuel xix. 2.

Jonathan was the eldest son of King Saul, the name ("the gift of Jehovah," corresponding to Theodorus in Greek) seems to have been common at that period. He first

appears some time after his father's accession. Of his own family we know nothing, except the birth of one son, five years before his death (2 Sam. iv. 4). He was regarded in his father's life-time as heir to the throne. Like Saul, he was a man of great strength and activity, of which the exploit at Michmash was a proof (2 Sam. i. 23). He was also famous for the peculiar martial exercises in which his tribe excelled—archery and slinging. His bow was to him what the spear was to his father: "The *bow* of Jonathan turned not back." It was always about him. It is through his relation to David that he is chiefly known to us, probably as related by his descendants at David's Court. But there is a back-ground, not so clearly given, of his relation with his father. From the time that he first appears he is Saul's constant companion. He was always present at his father's meals. As Abner and David seem to have occupied the places afterwards called the captaincies of "the host" and "of the guard"; so he seems to have been (as Hushai afterwards) "the friend." The whole story implies, without expressing, the deep attachment of the father and son. Jonathan can only go on his dangerous expedition (1 Sam. xiv. 1), by concealing it from Saul. Saul's vow is confirmed, and its tragic effect deepened, by his feeling for his son, "though it be Jonathan my son." "Tell me what thou hast done." Jonathan cannot bear to believe his father's enmity to David, "my father will do nothing great or small, but that he will show it to me; and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so." To him, if to any one, the wild frenzy of the King was amenable.—"Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan." Their mutual affection was indeed interrupted by the growth of Saul's insanity. Twice the father would have sacrificed the son: once in consequence of his vow (1 Sam. xiv.) The second time, more deliberately, on the discovery of David's flight: and on this last occasion, a momentary glimpse is given of some darker history. Were the phrases "son of a perverse rebellious woman," &c., mere frantic invectives? or, was there something in the story of Ahinoam or Rizpah which we do not know? "In fierce anger" Jonathan left the royal presence; but he cast his lot with his father's decline, not with his friend's rise, and "in death they were not divided."

Of the 3,000 men of whom Saul's standing army was formed 1,000 were under the command of Jonathan at Gibeah. The Philistines were still in the general command of the country; an officer was stationed at Geba, either the same as Jonathan's position, or close to it. In a sudden act of youthful daring, as when Tell rose against Gesler, or as in sacred history, Moses rose against the Egyptian, Jonathan slew this officer, and thus gave the signal for a general revolt. Saul took advantage of it, and the whole population rose, but it was a premature attempt. The Philistines poured in from the plain, and the tyranny became more deeply rooted than ever. Saul and Jonathan (with their immediate attendants), alone had arms, amidst the general weakness and disarming of the people. They were encamped at Gibeah, with a small body of six hundred men, and as they looked down from that height on the misfortunes of their country, and of their native tribe especially, they wept aloud. From this oppression as Jonathan by his former act had been the first to provoke it, so now he was the first to deliver his people. On the former occasion Saul had been equally with himself involved in the responsibility of the deed. Saul "blew the trumpet"; Saul had "smitten the officer of the Philistines." But now it would seem that Jonathan was resolved to undertake the whole risk himself. "The day," the day fixed by him approached, and without communicating his project to any one, except the young man, whom, like all the chiefs of that age, he retained as his armour-bearer, he sallied forth from Gibeah to attack the garrison of the Philistines stationed on the other side of the steep defile of Michmash. His words are short, but they breathe exactly the ancient and peculiar spirit of the Israelite warrior. "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that Jehovah will work for us: for there is no restraint to Jehovah to save by many or by few." The answer is no less characteristic of the close friendship of the two young men: already like to that which afterwards sprang up between Jonathan and David. "Do all that is in thine heart; . . . behold I am with thee; as thy heart is my heart." After the manner of the time, Jonathan proposed to draw an omen for their course from the conduct of the enemy. If the garrison, on seeing them, gave intimations of descending upon them, they would remain in the valley: if, on the other hand, they raised a challenge to advance, they were to accept it. The latter turned out to be the case. The first appearance of the two warriors from behind the rocks was taken by the Philistines, as a future apparition of "the Hebrews coming froth out of the holes where

they had hid themselves"; and they were welcomed with a scoffing invitation, "Come up, and we will show you a thing." Jonathan immediately took them at their word. Strong and active as he was, "strong as a lion, and swift as an eagle," he was fully equal to the adventure of climbing on his hands and feet up the face of the cliff. When he came directly in view of them, with his armour-bearer behind him, they both, after the manner of their tribe, discharged a flight of arrows, stones, and pebbles, from their bows, cross-bows, and slings, with such effect, that twenty men fell at the first onset. A panic seized the garrison, thence spread to the camp, and thence to the surrounding hordes of marauders; an earthquake combined with the terror of the moment; the confusion increased; the Israelites who had been taken slaves by the Philistines during the last three days rose in mutiny: the Israelites who lay hid in the numerous caverns and deep holes in which the rocks of the neighbourhood abound, sprang out of their subterranean dwellings. Saul and his little band had watched in astonishment the wild retreat from the heights of Gibeah—he now joined in the pursuit, which led him headlong after the fugitives, over the rugged plateau of Bethel, and down the path of Bethoron to Ajalon. The father and son had not met on that day: Saul only conjectured his son's absence from not finding him when he numbered the people. Jonathan had not heard of the rash curse which Saul invoked on any one who ate before the evening. In the dizziness and darkness which came on after his desperate exertions, he put forth the staff which apparently had (with his sling and bow) been his chief weapon, and tasted the honey which lay on the ground as they passed through the forest. The pursuers in general were restrained even from this slight indulgence by fear of the royal curse; but the moment that the day, with its enforced fast, was over, they flew, like Moslems at sunset during the fast of Ramadan, on the captured cattle; and devoured them, even to the brutal neglect of the law which forbade the dismemberment of the fresh carcasses with the blood. This violation of the law Saul endeavoured to prevent and to expiate by erecting a large stone, which served both as a rude table and as an altar; the first altar that was raised under the monarchy. It was in the dead of night after this wild revel was over, that he proposed that the pursuit should be continued till dawn; and then, when the silence of the oracle of the high priest indicated that something had occurred to intercept the Divine favour, the lot was tried and Jonathan appeared as the culprit. Jephthah's dreadful sacrifice would have been repeated; but the people interposed in behalf of the hero of that great day; and Jonathan was saved (1 Sam. xiv. 24-26).

This is the only great exploit of Jonathan's life. But the chief interest of his career is derived from the friendship with David, which began on the day of David's return from the victory over the champion of Gath, and continued till his death. It is the first Biblical instance of a romantic friendship, such as was common afterwards in Greece, and has been since in Christendom; and is remarkable both as giving its sanction to these, and as filled with a pathos of its own, which has been imitated, but never surpassed, in modern works of fiction. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul"—"Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Each found in each the affection that he found not in his own family: no jealousy of rivalry between the two, as claimants for the same throne, ever interposed: "Thou shalt be King in Israel, and I shall be next unto thee." The friendship was confirmed after the manner of the time, by a solemn compact often repeated. The first was immediately on their first acquaintance. Jonathan gave David as a pledge his royal mantle, his sword, his girdle, and his famous bow. His fidelity was soon called into action by the insane rage of his father against David. He interceded for his life, at first with success. Then the madness returned and David fled. It was in a secret interview during this flight, by the stone of Ezel, that the second covenant was made between the two friends, of a still more binding kind, extending to their mutual posterity—Jonathan laying such emphasis on this portion of the compact, as almost to suggest the belief of a slight misgiving on his part of David's future conduct in this respect. It is this interview which brings out the character of Jonathan in the liveliest colours—his little artifices—his love for both his father and his friend—his bitter disappointment at his father's unmanageable fury—his familiar sport of archery. With passionate embraces and tears the two friends parted to meet only once more, that one more meeting was far away in the forest of Ziph, during Saul's pursuit of David. Jonathan's alarm for his friend's life is now changed into a confidence that he will escape: "He strengthened his hand in God." Finally, and for the third time,

they renewed the covenant, and then parted for ever (1 Sam. xxiii. 16-18). From this time forth we hear no more till the battle of Gilboa. In that battle he fell, with his two brothers and his father, and his corpse shared their fate. The news of his death occasioned the celebrated elegy of David, in which he, as the friend, naturally occupies the chief place, and which seems to have been sung in the education of the archers of Judah, in commemoration of the one great archer, Jonathan: "He bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow."

Jonathan

BY REV. F. G. CHOLMONDELEY.

"Jonathan, Saul's son."—1 Samuel xix. 2.

The flower of Old Testament chivalry meets us in Jonathan. It is a trite phrase this, but carries its own suggestiveness along with it; for he is one of those, if I may so say, whom in fancy one would assign specifically to the flower-garden of Scripture. Judaism was a nursery for the Christ, a chosen plot under cultivation for the promised Seed. Lives have their meaning, and events their value, according to the place they fill in reference to the Messianic hope. The preparation for a harvest of blessing to be reaped in the fulness of time is the Divine *motif* running through all. This covers most of the ground. But there are just a few lives that blossom, as it were, outside all this, that might have been dispensed with for aught they were to contribute to the great after-reaping, yet which add a brightness and beauty of their own, something of sweetness and grace, without which the pages of Scripture would show less fair. Even such was the life of Jonathan.

Of his early years, the influences that moulded his childhood, we know nothing. There is only just the hint afforded by his name. For this eldest son of Saul was called Jonathan, "the gift of Jehovah," while of his younger sons, one was called Melchi-Shua, "the help of Moloch"; and another Ish-baal, "the man of Baal." This would seem to show that Saul's own religious feelings were yet strong in him when Jonathan was born. Bishop Hall perhaps overlooks what the father once had been, when he remarks in that quaint trenchant way of his, "Worthy Jonathan, which sprang from Saul, as some sweet imp grows out of a crab-stock, is therefore full of valour, because full of faith." He appears for the first time in full light upon the scene as the adventurous young warrior advancing almost single-handed against a garrison of the Philistines. It was a daring exploit, such as Joab or Abishai might have loved to attempt. Only Joab with all his valour was treacherous, and Abishai was cruel; whereas Jonathan was true as steel, and as gentle as he was brave. It was an exploit that none could have performed save one who was at home among the wild crags, sure of footing, swift to spring, able to rough it through a long day with strength of limb, quickness of eyesight, and steadiness of nerve. Herein he was like Esau; but a wild free roving animal life sufficed for Esau, whereas Jonathan was a true soldier of God. He was "therefore full of valour, because full of faith." He was not one of those who would leave religion to women and children, deeming it unmanly to fear God. But in all circumstances, not only in the camp and on the battle-field, but in his home, and in "the chastening disciple of common life," he did his duty steadfastly and fearlessly as only a man can do who is true to some higher promptings than the mere thought of self supplies. In him we see the heroic character of a Hector rather than of an Achilles. Achilles may have been the more splendid figure, but Hector was the more lovable, responding to the call of duty as the other to the call of fame, and fit to shine in other scenes than those of the battlefield by reason of the gentle spirit, the finely-tempered nature, that was in him. One of the most pathetic passages in the *Iliad* is the lament of Helen for Hector. He was the one of all her lord's kith and kin who had thoroughly won her love. None felt more keenly the mischief Paris had wrought; none had more reason to look reproachfully upon the woman whose unwelcome presence in Troy was jeopardizing all that he held dear: yet Helen with fast-falling tears declares that she had never had from him one wounding or spiteful word; nay, that he had stood her friend when

others upbraided, so that when Hector was by the cruel tongues were hushed. He had been gentle and considerate always, and his generous readiness to intervene on her behalf a comfort inexpressible throughout her sojourn at this foreign court, where none had been at pains to disguise their destestation.

It is a touching testimony, and counts for much. A mighty slaughterman was Achilles in his wrath, but "the grand old name of gentleman" we keep for Hector. In like mould was the young warrior of Israel cast. There was enmity, bitter enmity, between his father and his best friend, and this placed him in the most trying position; yet through it all he was true to his father, and through it all he was true to his friend. Had he allowed himself to be swayed by ambition, or to be carried away with the romance of friendship, he must have broken with one or the other. It was only the self-discipline of a really God-fearing man that enabled him to go true and straight, putting self on one side, nor yielding to his own feelings till he had tried them by the test of the will of God. For he was not deficient in spirit, nor possibly in ambition; and at the same time the people loved him, and he must have been conscious of possessing qualities that well fitted him to be Israel's king. But, as Bacon has well remarked, it is not the really great man, but the "man that hath no virtue in himself," that "ever envieth virtue in others." What made it harder for him was that his father distinctly tried to inspire him with his own jealousy: "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman," he exclaimed in one of his dark moods of frenzy, "do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion? . . . For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom." It was perfectly true. If purse or crown be dearer than good name, then Jonathan *was* standing in his own light most effectually by screening David as he did from his father's anger, and by serving his interests with such unflinching fidelity. But Jonathan knew what he was about. He was not an Esau trashing away in thoughtlessness the birthright for the loss of which he would hereafter come to weep in vain. He had plighted troth deliberately and advisedly, and his chivalrous spirit would never suffer him to turn traitor, even though it were to win a crown. Whom else can David have been thinking of when in later days he portrayed "the figure of stainless honour" in the 15th Psalm? "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle," &c.

But had David been true on his part? it might be urged. Was it not treacherous by Jonathan that he should entertain the thought of being king? No, Jonathan would have answered. This comes not of his own seeking. It is the Lord Who hath so appointed it. The God to Whom the first allegiance of us both requires that it should be so; and let that suffice. To fail in my fidelity to David would be to fail in my fidelity to God. Whatever others may say or think, no word or look of mine shall ever give David reason for supposing that I reckon him untrue to me in accepting the high destiny to which God has called him. In his self-abnegation the man who could reason thus ranks high to him who was the Bridegroom's friend, him who effaced himself before great David's greater Son, and whose place, for all he was so nobly gifted, was still but on the outer threshold of the kingdom, like Moses viewing from a height apart the rich inheritance into the possession of which it was Joshua, not himself, that should conduct the people.

I do love to think of that last recorded meeting between the two friends, when "Jonathan, Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God" (1 Sam. xxiii. 16). This friendship with Jonathan would seem to have been the one softening influence in David's life at a time when everything else must have been tending rather to harden him and to make him reckless. It is to Aristotle we owe the counsel, so admirable because so scrupulously altruistic, that, in the delicacy of his consideration for those he loves, a man should be forward in prosperity, and backward in adversity, to summon his friends about him; while the friend on his part should be as ready to fly to him who may have need of him in trouble, as he will be shy of intruding uninvited on his good fortune, lest any semblance of self-seeking should crowd the friendship. Well, Jonathan had it in him to do what the Greek philosopher taught. In his friend's extremity he discerned his opportunity.

Those were, indeed, among the darkest days of David's chequered career. He was an outlaw in constant peril of his life. Saul's malice seemed to know no bounds. He was determined to hunt him down. He was like a bloodhound on his track. Where to flee to David knew not. The future was as black as possible. His hope was almost gone. His faith had well-nigh failed. This outlaw's life had altered him in many

ways for the worse. But Jonathan had not forgotten him. His quick sympathy made him aware how desolate and despairing David must then be feeling. And so, when he got to know that David was hiding in the wood, though it was as much as his own life was worth if he should be discovered in communication with his father's enemy, "Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." Many are the kind offices that one friend may render to another, but this is the kindest and the best of all. St. Peter thought to do the part of a friend when he bade his Master put aside the thought of coming sufferings. The brethren at Tyre meant kindly when they besought St. Paul not to go up to Jerusalem where bonds and afflictions were awaiting him. But there was no real kindness here. It only made it harder for St. Paul, as for his Master, to be thus dissuaded from the path of duty—"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?" he cried. His hand was weakened, and not strengthened by their entreaties. It was otherwise when for the last time Jonathan had speech with David. Neither knew it was their last meeting; yet, had they known, they could not well have wished it different—just they two by themselves in the solitary wood, perhaps in the stillness of the night, and opening out their hearts to each other so freely. No hard unkind things were said about anybody. No words were wasted over trivial and unworthy matters. Together they faced the future, accepting dutifully, so far as they could discern it, the lot which God was marking out for each. With all sacredness as beneath the eye of Heaven they renewed their pledges of friendship with each other. Together they must have knelt and prayed. And if David felt, as never before, the wonderful unselfish generosity of his friend, and was troubled with the thought of seeming to take unfair advantage of it, Jonathan was there to smooth away his scruples, and to set his mind at rest, while strengthening his hand in God. Often in after years must David have thought of that last meeting, often must he have longed to have Jonathan once more beside him, as, when hardly holding his own against the masterful Joab, "These men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me," he said. Oh! to have Jonathan back again with his gentle chivalrous spirit; but it could not be.

There is something inexpressibly touching in the lamentation wherein the feelings of the new king found vent when the news reached him of the fatal issue of the bloody fight on Mount Gilboa. In its inception it strikes one as a studied composition, a sort of national ode designed to give expression to the feelings of the people at a time of deep emotion, such an ode as we should look for nowadays from the Poet Laureate. It is the nation's point of view that is adopted. The Saul commemorated is the Saul who was worthy to live in popular recollection, the nobler Saul of earlier better days, the warrior tall and swift and strong and dauntless, the champion to be admired, the leader to be trusted, the king in all things kingly, in whom great hopes centred and were not belied. Nor in any eyes were such an ode complete if there fell no equal meed of praise on him who was one with Saul in valour and renown, the gallant Jonathan, his soldier son, his inseparable comrade in all martial exploits, whose daring was unsurpassed, whose fidelity was unswerving, who had fought as heroes fight, and now had fallen as heroes fall, in death as in life dutiful to his father, loyal to his king. If their two swords could not purchase victory, then together they could but die. It is at this point that David's personal feelings fairly master him. He had studiously discarded the personal point of view in speaking about Saul. To a generous nature such as his it was easy so to do, and Death by his very ruthlessness commends memories to mercy. But when David comes to speak of Jonathan all other considerations are swallowed up in the sense of personal loss. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." The words are few, and they are simple, but if ever words came straight from the heart these did. His whole soul quivers under the stress of one emotion, a yearning regret for the fastest fondest friend man ever had. Is it the moral of such moments that it were better never to have loved at all? Only a Stoic would reason so. It is the glory of our humanity to be susceptible of such a grief. The future may show all dark, the present be all tearful, but from the past a light still streams, and the murky foreground is relieved by the soft rainbow's chastened glow, in which all tender memories sweetly blend. Every life that had light in it, though fallen behind, projects a brightness forwards that is like a pledge of promise. Hope could scarce be if memory were not. We thank the poet who enriched the chart celestial with "the Morning-star of Memory." They live in our thoughts the dear ones who are gone,

the; who were tried and trusted, they who were gentle and pure, they whose affection lifted us and strengthened us; and they are "thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality."

Jonathan

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"My brother Jonathan."—2 Samuel i. 26.

In reviewing the story of Jonathan, we must bear in mind that the early years of king Saul's reign have a very short record in Scripture, and that events which we might suppose to have taken place near the beginning of it, did not happen for years afterwards. The mistake is encouraged by the fact that, partly by mistranslation, and partly from a figure being wrong in the text as we have it, that is ascribed to the second year of Saul's reign which probably happened in the twenty-second. Still the few incidents which are recorded suffice to give us something definite as to the position of Jonathan. He was the eldest son, and at the time we meet him first had ceased to be a young man. He had four brothers younger than himself, of whom the youngest was forty years old at Saul's death. David was at the same date thirty years old, not having been born till Saul had been ten years on the throne. At the time of his victory over Goliath he cannot have been much under twenty years of age, and Jonathan then must have been nearly forty.

This is to be borne in mind as one of the factors in judging of his character and conduct afterwards; when brought into contact with David he was not a youth, but a man of mature years, caution and judgment.

Jonathan early gained a great reputation in Israel. Though not possessing the bodily advantages or the splendid physique of his father Saul, he is yet coupled with him in David's lines, "Swifter were they than eagles; stronger than lions." He was famous as an archer, and also as a soldier by the dashing and heroic character of his exploits. Once he attacked the garrison at Geba, or at least the officer's guard there, and slew the chief in the midst of his men. And once again, in a stormy night of tempest and earthquake, he and a single comrade attacked the Philistine post at Michmash, and created a panic which spread to half an army.

Another side of his character is shown us by many incidents and passing words,—in a marvellous personal affection between him and his father Saul. "My father will do nothing . . . but that he will show it me" (1 Sam. xx. 2). Such was the father's confidence in his son. And when Jonathan would run a greater personal risk than usual, he does not tell his father till it is over (xiv. 1), partly to save him anxiety, and partly lest the father's affection should interfere and prevent the enterprize. Such were the happy relations of the son and father. We are surprised to find such feelings in Saul, but they accord with all we know of Jonathan. They were "lovely and pleasant in their lives" (2 Sam i. 23).

All this must have been affected, and probably much deepened, by the painful rejection of king Saul by God at the hands of the Prophet Samuel, which rested on two acts of disobedience, and passed from a lighter to a graver stage. The former resulted from an impatience in Saul, which could not wait till the Prophet came, but impelled him to offer the sacrifice himself, contrary to the command of God (1 Sam. xiii. 13). His second offence was in sparing of the spoil of Amalek, an act of direct and even daring disobedience, which he sought to cover by evasion and deceit (xv. 20, 21). Saul having thus publicly dishonoured God, is publicly cast off by Him. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being king" (ver. 23). It is noticeable that both sins were connected with an *act of sacrifice*, from which we may infer the presence of self-delusion on Saul's part; and they are the means of bringing in the valuable lesson, never out of date, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22).

It is after these events that we first read of David the shepherd boy at Bethlehem. After the memorable visit of Samuel, the boy goes back to his sheep, hiding these things in his heart. The story of Goliath's defiance and defeat then takes place: in which, let us note, the heroic Jonathan has no part, for even he is content to let the

defiance pass without challenge; and David becomes the new hero of Israel, of whom the women sing, and whom the soldiers envy. When the fight is over, David is brought to court to be presented to the king. Here there begins the next development of character on the part of Jonathan, the prince of the people. Everything leads to the rousing of jealousy on his part, and that to no ordinary height. He has been in the past the great soldier and the favourite prince, in whose future the hope of Israel has been placed. His record has been that of courage, success, and unbroken victory, marred only by the failure to take up Goliath's challenge. And here is the son of an unknown subject, only a shepherd, only a musician, a lad in years, not even a soldier, who at one bound has reached the very summit of a warrior's ambition. And already the songs of the people speak of him—"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul and David! So already Jonathan's feats are forgotten, and Jonathan's name is not even mentioned. Standing at his father's side when the lad of Bethlehem is introduced by Abner, and carries the Philistine's gory head in his hand, what are we to see on the part of Jonathan? Is it an outburst of petulance and jealous rage at being thus overshadowed and belittled before a too successful rival? Such things are not unknown in courts. But no such thing is here. Rare purity and kingliness of soul in the son of Saul! There is no admirer of David that day half so warm, or generous, as Jonathan. Nay, it is more, it is better than admiration. He sees and recognizes a brother soul. The heart of the prince goes out to the heart of the shepherd. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." There is sworn between them a brotherly covenant—the first of several which are afterwards made. Jonathan gives David his own sword, his favourite bow, his girdle, and his military tunic (his coat of mail, if they had such things then) (see Exod. xxviii. 32, R.V.). And when Saul was very wroth, and could not bear the reputation which the lad David had obtained among the people, Jonathan felt as though David had been his youngest brother, and extended to him more than a brother's love.

Something more, however, soon emerged. A rumour arose that the Prophet Samuel had been commissioned to fix on some one to occupy the throne in place of the rejected Saul. And it was not Saul's son, not any of his sons. But as God had chosen Saul from out of the people to be the first king, so He had chosen another to be the second, and that choice had fallen on young David. To let it be known was to test both Saul and David; but it was no less a test, severe and trying, to Jonathan, whose hopes of succession it entirely destroyed. Indeed, for him it was a far more terrible trial than it was for his father. Yet the thing was known. Samuel had said, "The Lord hath given the kingdom to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou" (Sam. xv. 28). Saul had heard who it was when he said, "As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom" (xx. 31). Jonathan himself knew it when he said, "Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth" (xxiii. 17).

This lad, then, was the usurper who was to take the crown that would have fallen to the natural heir; and he of all men would surely resent it, if he were not more than man. Yet there was something more than man about him: a Divine hand was on his heart, and a Divine Spirit in his mouth; his love left no room for jealousy: his love for David was "wonderful, passing the love of women."

But Saul had no such quixotic sentiment. He hated with all the energy of a passionate heart the upstart shepherd whose appearance brooded such calamities to the royal house. The spirit of murder was in his eye, but something in his cooler moments restrained him. It had been no difficult thing for him to issue a command, or at least to give a hint that would be understood, to slay David. But something (*we* know what it was, though for the time *he* did not) held him back. More than once, however, in the rage of insanity, he attempted murder with his own hand, and hurled the heavy javelin at David's head to pin him against the wall. Both times the invisible power of God turned the spear aside, and saved Saul from blood-guiltiness.

But Jonathan's love survived this also. Between his father, whom he loved, and David, whom he loved still more, Jonathan came, bearing his father's anger, risking once the taking of his own life by his father's insane hand to save his friend. And then he made with David a second brotherly covenant, to be true to each other to the death, the survivor to remember it to another generation.

Saul took then a farther step, and drove David into rebellion. For several years the pursuit went on, David being at the head of an armed band of several hundred

men. During all this time where was Jonathan? Only once do we get a glimpse of him, and it is to find that his heart is still unchanged towards David. In the forest of Ziph they meet for the last time (xxiii. 16). A presentiment has fallen upon both it may be so, and then Jonathan encourages his friend to persevere. "He strengthened his hand in God." He put into words more plainly than ever his belief in David's career, and his consent to it. Here once more, for the third time, they "made a covenant before the Lord," a covenant of which God was the Witness and the Surety, that they would be true one to the other, and that they would love, and be lovers, till the end. They "parted ne'er to meet again." But they kept their vow. Years succeed, as we reckon, for the record gives no dates, and there are long gaps of silence. The silence, so far as Jonathan is concerned, is all but complete. During this time, if not earlier, he married, for a son is born to him two or three years before the close of his life. This child is dropped by a careless nurse, to the lifelong injury and lameness of the boy. And when we next meet with Jonathan the prince, it is for the last time. He is by his father's side, and at the head of the host of Israel, opposing the Philistines upon the hills of Gilboa—"the Flodden Field" of the kingdom of Israel, when the army was destroyed, and Saul and his three sons miserably perished.

Such, then, is the outward framework of the life of the prince of Israel. I gather up the spiritual lineaments of it in a few closing words.

1. And first, Jonathan believed, without a doubt, God's word. It was the word which came through Samuel, which passed sentence on Saul, his father, and which took from him the prospect of succeeding to his father's throne. The message could not but have been most unwelcome—the death of ambition and the grave of hope. There was every temptation to unbelief, but Jonathan had thus early learned the lesson that every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God is a sacred and an inviolate thing. He believed God. He did it to his own disadvantage, and he did it fully.

2. Next, he accepted God's decision. Whether there was a desperate struggle in his heart before he could do so, we know not; there is no hint of it. When first we see him after he knows the Divine purpose, he has the same calm demeanour, as if it had never been otherwise, as if he had been born in the farmhouse and David in the palace. His will has given to God's will. He murmurs not—he rebels not.—His the spirit of sacrifice, and his the heart which sacrifice sours not, but sweetens, the heart which finds God in the place which ambition occupied before.

3. We see in Jonathan, again, what Christ calls "taking up the cross," and that from day to day. Jonathan's cross was appointed by God, though he was brought to it and stretched upon it by the enemies of God and Israel. Though the heir-apparent to the throne, he was never to occupy it. Though reared in the lap of splendour and luxury, breathing from his cradle the air of a court, and surrounded by those who hastened to fulfil his every wish, he was to be taught to live, amid all these, the life of sacrifice. And God taught him the lesson. He was one of the few to whom their future life on earth has been, in outline, made known. The shadow of the future darkened his career. No day passed with its splendid temptation but he said, "I shall never sit on the throne of the kingdom." Never did he see David but the thought came, He is the chosen of God. Yet he did not complain of the arrangement of the All-Wise, of Whose purposes he had obtained a glimpse. He did not turn away either with fear or in rebellion from that dark object which blocked the way; but with a spirit which already calls up that of the Prince of Peace, Whose kingdom is not of this world, he takes the cup into his keeping, hiding it in his tent and in his palace, in war and peace, saying, "It is the cup which my Father hath given me."

4. And so we find in him one of the most remarkable instances in Scripture of a man who has come to live in the continual and conscious presence of God. Mark how, in all the crises of his life, he turns to God in confidence, sees Him on either hand, and speaks of Him in nearly every sentence. When he does his brave deed at Michmash (1 Sam. xiv. 6-17), he begins by the acknowledgement that God can save by few as well as by many; when he talks to his comrade about it, he says that the deliverance must come from the Lord; when the appointed sign is given, he cries out that the Lord has delivered the enemy into his hand; and such is the influence of his example that the rest of the chapter is taken up with cases of others who see God also. He has brought God into the sphere of their common life. It is the same when David and he have the celebrated meeting in the field where the arrows are shot (xx. 12-23). Every two or three verses God is spoken of. Now it is "as the Lord liveth"; now it is a

cry to "the Lord God of Israel" to witness what is done; now it is "the Lord be with thee"; and now it is "when the Lord hath cut off" David's enemies. These pious words came, not, as we might expect, from David, but, in the ratio of four to one, from the lips of Jonathan. All which shows to those who can understand, that the foundation of Jonathan's character, and the key to his wonderful unselfishness, and courage, and love, are the fear and the faith of God; that he was one of the few men to whom God is a reality, and a reality which is always with us; that, in a word, he was so accustomed to take everything to God, and to find God in everything, that his heart turned to God first, whatever happened.

5. But another feature in the history of Jonathan remains, and it is, unfortunately, not of the same cheering or unquestionable character. It is connected with the singular silence which surrounds the latter years of his life, and the circumstances of his departure. From the time that David leaves the palace of Saul we have only one glimpse of Jonathan, when he steals into the wood of Ziph for a few moments of hurried interview, and then no more till his body is found upon Gilboa, slain by the enemies of the Lord in a dishonoured death.

What can the meaning be? Is it the story so often told of the removal of a godly companion, and the falling back into the arms of worldly friends? Is it the case of a man living in a luxurious house where God is not honoured; the well-beloved son of a father who does not serve God; the husband of a wife who does not know God; the inmate of a home where God is treated as a stranger; the case where a man ceases to testify, seeks peace in silence, and finds backsliding instead of peace? Is that the key to the latter days of Jonathan the noble? Possibly so: for no man in Holy Writ, save Jesus, is a man of stainless life; and Scripture softens no truth to save any man's reputation. In such a fact, if fact it be, there are lessons and warnings for us. Such records are, alas, strewn all along the way of consecrated lives. But whatever be the failings and the drawbacks of the faithful, it is good to go with them over the splendid deeds which they have done for God, and breathe again as we do so the bracing air of the Heavenlier altitudes of human life. For it is there that we too might ourselves be living, and that the grace of Christ is able to carry and to keep the children of God.

Jonathan

BY REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

"Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David."—1 Samuel xix. 2.

How came Jonathan to be so unlike his father—so unselfish, so patient, so loyal? His devotion to David may seem, to the young and unreflecting, a sign of weakness. But before we condemn Jonathan as effeminate, let us remember that it is always the noblest who love most nobly, and that there is no tenderness like that of the strong. To be unselfish, in honour to prefer one another, is obviously harder than to be selfish and to assert one's own claim to honour.

Nor is there anything in the Sacred Record which lends the slightest countenance to the assumption that Jonathan was a weakling, or that his passion for David was the mere folly of thoughtless youth, flinging away a crown to indulge a caprice. On the contrary, so far as we can recover the dubious chronology of the time, he was more than thirty years of age before he set eyes on David; and his love for him must therefore have been the mature and deliberate election of manhood. He was brave to a fault, and had distinguished himself in the most perilous enterprises. He was one of the fleetest runners and boldest cragsmen in all Israel. He was the most expert archer of a tribe of archers; and his bow, "which turned not back" from any odds, was as inseparable from him as was the spear, or "javelin," from Saul. As a commander he had shewn more coolness and sagacity, and not less courage, than his father. One or two of his exploits indeed—as, for instance, that of Michmash—were of an almost incredible temerity.

In fine, we meet with no more manly, athletic, and chivalrous figure in the Old Testament history than that of Jonathan. And yet *this* was the man who hailed David as his future king, and, in token of his submission, arrayed the stripling shepherd in his own princely mantle, and gave him his arms and armour, down even to the celebrated bow which had wrought such havoc among the enemies of Israel.

Why did he do it? Not simply because he was smitten with the charm of David's person and character; though doubtless he felt *that*, as did every one else who saw the beautiful poet soul shining through his "fair eyes" and comely winning face. There are other and less costly ways of shewing such an affection as this. But he may have subordinated himself to David, in part, out of sheer loyalty to his friend, and in a humble, loving admiration of his superior gifts. For the man was loyal to the very core. He was as true—a point often overlooked, though very suggestive—to his father as he was to his friend. And Saul had not been a tender father to him; or, at best, his tenderness had often broken into fierce and sullen moods. In these moods he had spurned Jonathan for the noble friendship and generous devotion which have made his name a praise in the earth. He had hurled his javelin at him with murderous intent, as at David. He had even loaded the memory of Jonathan's mother with foul and infamous reproaches, so that Jonathan strode from his presence "in fierce anger," lest he too should be tempted to forget himself. And yet this brave prince was true and loyal to his father to the end—following *him*, though we may well suppose he would far rather have gone after David, allying himself with what he knew to be a doomed and losing cause, fighting with and for him, and at last dying with him and for him in the fatal conflict of Gilboa: insomuch that in his *Elegy* David, forgetting all the father's faults and wrongs, remembering only the loyalty and love of the son, exclaims, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

"The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul"; yet he did not *indulge* his love for David. "Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David"; yet he did not throw in his lot with that of the man he loved. In him love conquered self-love and ambition; but even love itself was ruled by duty, and yielded to the sacred claims of his father and his king. True to David, he could not be untrue to Saul.

For—and here, I think, we reach the true secret of this noble character—in Jonathan both love and duty were ruled and sustained by piety. The Will of God was his supreme law. It was his deference to that high and kindly Will which made him so true at once to his father and to his friend, which induced him first to sacrifice his own claim to the throne, and then to subordinate his love for David to Saul's claim on his loyalty as a subject, his duty as a son. Both these sacrifices must have been hard to flesh and blood. Jonathan could not but have been aware that the people loved him, and looked on him as the destined successor Saul. He could not but be aware that he had that in him which would have made him a nobler, a far better, king than Saul—more patient and self-restrained, more thoughtful for the welfare of his subjects, more obedient to the Divine Will. Nor can we suppose that he resigned this lofty and alluring prospect without an effort or a pang. But he knew that God had chosen David for the throne; he confessed it in the words, "Fear not, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee, and thou shalt be king over Israel; and this also Saul my father knoweth." And because the Will of God was his law, he was content to be next unto David, and only stipulated: "If I live, shew me the kindness of the Lord; and if I die, cut not off thy kindness from my house when the Lord hath cut off all thine enemies from the face of the earth." So perfect was his submission that he bore no grudge to the man who was preferred before him and placed above him, but, as we are told again and again, "loved him as his own soul."

Even this, noble as it was, may not have been his most noble and heroic self-conquest. For a perfect friendship, a passionate love and admiration such as his, is apt to conclude that, having sacrificed all for love, it may at least give free scope to that love. It is apt to assume that such a love has rights which may be allowed to override all other claims. But even this indulgence Jonathan is called upon to resign. He must separate himself as from "his own soul." He cannot follow David, much as he loves him. He can only stand by while David is "hunted like a partridge on the mountains." For if God has chosen David rather than himself to sit on the throne in future years, it is also the will of God that for the present, and as long as he lives, Saul shall be king. His first duty, therefore, is to his king, to his father. And he, who had already subordinated his natural and honourable ambition to the claims of love, must now subordinate love itself to the claims of duty.

Jonathan stands before us, then, as the type of noble and heroic friendship, of pure and disinterested love. And if, as we contemplate him, any of us are tempted to say,

"Alas, there are no such men now!" or "Would that I had such a friend as he!" we need to be reminded that these sighing exclamations commonly issue from the lips of men who are thinking mainly of what *they* should gain by such a friendship, and so prove themselves to be utterly unworthy of it. We need to be reminded that the wish which his noble example should prompt is not, "Would that I *had* such a friend" but, "Would that I could *be* such a friend as Jonathan!"

And if we would share in the sublimity of Jonathan's friendship for David, we must take the steep and difficult path he trod, the path of self-sacrifice: nay, we must even learn to forego the *joys* of self-sacrifice at the command of duty. Love is not so rare as the world assumes it to be. Most of us have felt its gracious constraints at some period of our lives, and have been ready to count the world well lost if only we could win the love we craved, and gratify the love we cherished. But what *is* rare, and as noble as rare, is to hold even love itself, or its gratification, subordinate to the claims of duty. "Thy love to me was wonderful," says David of Jonathan, "passing the love of women"; and yet Jonathan refused to gratify that love and to cast in his lot with that of David. Old ties were not to be broken, or ignored because new ties had been formed. Old duties were not to be neglected because of the duties created by a new affection. If he owed much to his friend, he also owed much to his father and king. And, difficult as it was, Jonathan contrived to reconcile both duties, to be true to both affections.

It is a lesson which we all, and especially the young, need to lay to heart. Love *has* its duties, has its *claims*. But, however pure and passionate it may be, there are other claims which even love has no right to override. It has not always even the highest claim. Duty stands higher than love, and may forbid the indulgence of love. No love can be more pure, more disinterested, more self-sacrificing than that of Jonathan for David; and yet it was not David, but Saul, for whom he lived and died. And if his victory over self counts for much with us, his victory over the cravings and impulses of love stands for more. It is this which adds the last and perfecting touch to his heroic character.

No doubt there are times in which love should stand first with us, in which it has the supreme claim, and can prove itself to be the supreme duty. Love is not to be daunted by every difficulty, nor to yield either to every suggestion of prudence or to any unreasonable caprice. But let not those who are divided between the claims of love and the sense of duty too hastily assume that duty must be sacrificed to love. Duty, if it be real, should stand first, though all that calls itself duty is not deserving of the name any more than all that calls itself love: and to indulge love at the cost of duty is only too likely to be the death of love in the end; for when the first fever of delight is passed, the voice of duty, hushed for a time, is sure to make itself heard, to speak in louder and more authoritative tones, and to induce a miserable conflict in the heart, in which all delight will be lost.

But if our love is to be pure, if it is to be of so high a strain that it will not sin against duty; if love is to conquer self, and duty is to conquer love, the Will of God must be our supreme law. We must be devoted to Him Who made us capable of both love and duty, and Who alone can teach us how to reconcile their claims when they are in conflict with each other. I do not say that "*mere natural piety*" will not induce a pure unselfish love, or teach men to deny love the indulgence it craves if a higher duty stand in the way. I do not even like to call it "*mere natural piety*"; for all piety, as all love and duty, is the gift of God. But I do say that Jonathan would have found it much harder, and might have found it quite impossible, either to love a successful rival to the throne "as his own soul," or to sacrifice his "delight" in David to his duty to Saul, if he had not believed in God, if he could not have rested in the wisdom and kindness of the Will which had appointed him the lower place and a duty not delightful to him. I do say that whether in the conflict between love and selfishness, or between love and duty, no man can be sure of himself, or sure of victory, if, beyond all selfish delights and all the delights of love, he does not delight himself in God.

David

BY REV. J. H. NEWMAN, B.D.

"Behold I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite," etc.—1 Samuel xvi. 18.

When Saul was finally rejected for not destroying the Amalekites, Samuel was bid go to Beth-lehem, and anoint as future king of Israel, one of the sons of Jesse, who should be pointed out to him when he was come there. Samuel accordingly went thither and held a sacrifice; when, at his command, Jesse's seven sons were brought by their father, one by one, before the Prophet; but none of them proved to be the choice of Almighty God. David was the youngest and out of the way, and it seemed to Jesse as unlikely that God's choice should fall upon him, as it appeared to Joseph's brethren and to his father, that he and his mother and brethren should, as his dreams foretold, bow down before him. On Samuel's inquiring, Jesse said, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." On Samuel's bidding he was sent for. "Now he was ruddy," the sacred historian proceeds, "and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him, for this is he." After Samuel had anointed him, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." It is added, "But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul."

David's anointing was followed by no other immediate mark of God's favour. He was tried by being sent back again, in spite of the promise, to the care of his sheep, till an unexpected occasion introduced him to Saul's Court. The withdrawing of the Spirit of the Lord from Saul was followed by frequent attacks from an evil spirit, as judgment upon him. His mind was depressed, and a "trouble," as it is called, came upon him, with symptoms very like those which we now refer to derangement. His servants thought that music, such, perhaps, as was used in the schools of the prophets, might soothe and restore him; and David was recommended by one of them for that purpose, in the words of the text: "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite," etc.

David came in the power of that sacred influence whom Saul had grieved and rejected. The Spirit which inspired his tongue guided his hand also, and his sacred songs became a medicine to Saul's diseased mind. "When the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, . . . David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." Thus he is first introduced to us in that character in which he still has praise in the Church, as "the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel."

Saul "loved David greatly, and he became his armour-bearer"; but the first trial of his humility and patience was not over, while many other trials were in store. After a while he was for the second time sent back to his sheep; and though there was war with the Philistines, and his three eldest brethren were in the army with Saul, and he had already essayed his strength in defending his father's flocks from wild beasts, and was a "mighty valiant man," yet he contentedly stayed at home as a private person, keeping his promise of greatness to himself, till his father bade him go to his brethren to take them a present from him, and report how they fared. An accident, as it appeared to the world, brought him forward. On his arrival at the army, he heard the challenge of the Philistine champion, Goliath of Gath. I need not relate how he was divinely urged to engage the giant, how he killed him, and how he was, in consequence, again raised to Saul's favour; who, with an infirmity not inconsistent with the deranged state of his mind, seems to have altogether forgotten him.

From this time began David's public life; but not yet the fulfilment of the promise made to him by Samuel. He had a second and severer trial of patience to endure for many years; the trial of "being still" and doing nothing before God's time, though he had (apparently) the means in his hands of accomplishing the promise for himself. It was to this trial that Jeroboam afterwards showed himself unequal. He, too, was promised a kingdom, but he was tempted to seize upon it in his own way, and so forfeited God's protection.

David's victory over Goliath so endeared him to Saul, that he would not let him go back to his father's house. Jonathan too, Saul's son, at once felt for him a warm affection, which deepened into a firm friendship. "Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's

servants." This prosperous fortune however, did not long continue. As Saul passed through the cities from his victory over his enemies, the women of Israel came out to meet him, singing and dancing, and they said, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Immediately the jealous king was "very wroth, and the saying displeased him"; his sullenness returned; he feared David as a rival; and "eyed him from that day and forward." On the morrow, as David was playing before him, as at other times, Saul threw his javelin at him. After this Saul displaced him from his situation at his court, and sent him to the war, hoping so to rid himself of him by his falling in the battle; but, by God's blessing, David returned victorious.

In a second war with the Philistines, David was successful as before; and Saul, overcome with gloomy and malevolent passions, again cast at him with his javelin, as he played before him, with the hope of killing him.

This repeated attempt on his life drove David from Saul's court; and for some years after, that is, till Saul's death, he was a wanderer upon the earth, persecuted in that country which was afterwards to be his own kingdom. Here, as in his victory over Goliath, Almighty God purposed to show us, that it was *His* hand which set David on the throne of Israel. David conquered his enemy by a sling and a stone, in order, as he said at the time, that all . . . might know "that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's." Now again, but in a different way, His guiding providence was displayed. As David slew Goliath without arms, so now he refrained himself and used them not, though he possessed them. Like Abraham, he traversed the land of promise "as a strange land," waiting for God's good time. Nay, far more exactly, even than to Abraham, was it given to David to act and suffer that life of faith which the Apostle describes, and by which "the elders obtained a good report." By faith he wandered about, "being destitute, afflicted, evil-entreated, in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth." On the other hand, through the same faith, he "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

On escaping from Saul, he first went to Samuel to ask his advice. With him he dwelt some time. Driven thence by Saul he went to Bethlehem, his father's city, then to Ahimelech, the high priest, at Nob. Thence he fled, still through fear of Saul, to Achish, the Philistine king of Gath; and finding his life in danger there, he escaped to Adullam, where he was joined by his kindred, and put himself at the head of an irregular band of men, such as, in the unsettled state of the country, might be usefully and lawfully employed against the remnant of the heathen. After this he was driven to Hareth, to Keilah, which he rescued from the Philistines, to the wilderness of Ziph among the mountains, to the wilderness of Maon, to the strongholds of Engedi, to the wilderness of Paran. After a time he again took himself to Achish, king of Gath, who gave him a city; and there it was that the news was brought to him of the death of Saul in battle, which was the occasion of his elevation first to the throne of Judah, afterwards to that of all Israel, according to the promise of God made to him by Samuel.

It need not be denied that, during these years of wandering, we find in David's conduct instances of infirmity and inconsistency, and some things which, without being clearly wrong, are yet strange and startling in so favoured a servant of God. With these we are not concerned, except so far as a lesson may be gained from them for ourselves. On the whole his situation during these years of trial was certainly that of a witness for Almighty God, one who does good and suffers for it, nay, suffers on rather than rid himself from suffering by any unlawful act.

Now, then, let us consider what was, as far as we can understand, his special grace, what is his gift; as faith was Abraham's distinguishing virtue, meekness the excellence of Moses, self-mastery the gift especially conspicuous in Joseph.

This question may best be answered by considering the purpose for which he was raised up. When Saul was disobedient, Samuel said to him, "Thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought Him *a man after His own heart*, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee." Saul had neglected his Master's honour; but David, in this *an* eminent type of Christ, "came to do God's will" as a viceroy in Israel, and, as being tried and found faithful, he is especially called "*a man after God's own heart*."

David's peculiar excellence, then, is that of *fidelity to the trust committed to him*; a firm, uncompromising, single-hearted devotion to the cause of his God, and a burning zeal for His honour.

This characteristic virtue is especially illustrated in the early years of his life which have engaged our attention. He was tried therein and found faithful; before he was put in power, it was proved whether he could obey. Till he came to the throne, he was like Moses or Samuel, an instrument in God's hands, bid do what was told him and nothing more;—having borne this trial of obedience well, in which Saul had failed, then at length he was entrusted with a sort of discretionary power, to use in his Master's service.

Observe how David was tried, and what various high qualities of mind he displayed in the course of the trial. First, the promise of greatness was given him, and Samuel anointed him. Still he stayed in the sheepfolds; and though called away by Saul for a time, yet returned contentedly when Saul released him from attendance. Afterwards for seven years, as the time appears to be, he withstood the strong temptation, ever before his eyes, of acting without God's guidance, when he had the means of doing so. Though skilful in arms, popular with his countrymen, successful against the enemy, the king's son-in-law, and on the other hand grievously injured by Saul, who not only continually sought his life, but even suggested to him a traitor's conduct by accusing him of treason, and whose life was several times in his hands, yet he kept his honour pure and unimpeachable. He feared God and honoured the king; and this at a time of life especially exposed to the temptations of ambition.

Let us call to mind some of the circumstances of his steadfastness recorded in the history.

He was about twenty-three years old when he slew the Philistine; yet, when placed over Saul's men of war, in the first transport of his victory, we are told he "behaved himself wisely." When fortune turned, and Saul became jealous of him, still "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him." How like is this to Joseph under different circumstances! "Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely he was afraid of him; and all Israel and Judah loved David." Again, "And David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much set by."

The same modest deportment marks his subsequent conduct. He consistently seeks counsel of God. When he fled from Saul he went to Samuel; afterwards we find him following the directions of the prophet Gad, and afterwards of Abiathar the high priest. Here his character is in full contrast to the character of Saul.

Further, consider his behaviour towards Saul, when he had him in his power; it displays a most striking and admirable union of simple faith and unblemished loyalty.

Saul, while in pursuit of him, went into a cave in Engedi. David surprised him there, and his companions advised to seize him, if not to take his life. They said, "Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee." David, in order to show Saul how entirely his life had been in his power, arose and cut off a part of his robe privately. After he had done it, his "heart smote him" even for this slight freedom, as if it were a disrespect offered towards his king and father. "He said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." When Saul left the cave, David followed him and cried, "My Lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed himself." He hoped that he could now convince Saul of his integrity. "Wherefore hearest thou men's words," he asked, "saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee. . . . Moreover, my father, see, yea see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see, that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee: yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. . . . After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. The Lord therefore judge . . . and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand." Saul was for the time overcome; he said, "Is this thy voice, my son David? and Saul lifted up his voice and wept." And he said, "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." He added, "And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king." At another time David surprised Saul in the midst of his camp, and his companion would have killed him; but he said, "Destroy him not, for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's

anointed and be guiltless?" Then, as he stood over him, he meditated sorrowfully on his master's future fortunes, while he himself refrained from interfering with God's purposes. "Surely the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle and perish." David retired from the enemy's camp; and when at a safe distance, roused Saul's guards, and blamed them for their negligent watch, which had allowed a stranger to approach the person of their king. Saul was moved the second time; the miserable man, as if waking from a dream which hung about him, said, "I have sinned; return, my son David . . . behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." He added, truth overcoming him, "Blessed be thou, my son David; thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail."

How beautiful are these passages in the history of the chosen king of Israel! How do they draw our hearts towards him, as one whom in his private character it must have been an extreme privilege and a great delight to know! Surely the blessings of the patriarchs descended in a united flood upon "the lion of the tribe of Judah," the type of the true redeemer who was to come. He inherits the prompt faith and magnanimity of Abraham; he is simple as Isaac; he is humble as Jacob; he has the youthful wisdom and self-possession, the tenderness, the affectionateness, and the firmness of Joseph. And, as his own especial gift, he has an overflowing thankfulness, an ever-burning devotion, a zealous fidelity to his God, a high unshaken loyalty towards his king, an heroic bearing in all circumstances, such as the multitude of men see to be great, but cannot understand. Be it our blessedness, unless the wish be presumptuous, so to acquit ourselves in troubled times; cheerful amid anxieties, collected in dangers, generous towards enemies, patient in pain and sorrow, subdued in good fortune!

David

BY REV. JUSTIN E. TWICHELL, D.D.

"Then came all the elders of Israel to David unto Hebron," etc.—2 Samuel v. 1-12.

The time had come for David to take the place for which he had been chosen and anointed. He was to be made king over all Israel. His experiences had been exceptional and most remarkable.

I. LOOK AT ISRAEL IN THOSE YEARS OF WAITING FOR THEIR KING.

Near five centuries before the founding of the kingdom, the rule which was to govern the conduct of their coming king had been lodged in the archives of their nation. He had been seen at the helm of human affairs, of Whom it was written: "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." While Joshua lived the chosen people were prosperous and joyful. When that great leader for the last time gathered Israel together, they were full of confidence in God.

For a season after Joshua's death they were under the protecting rule of elders, and they kept the covenant of the Lord. They were, however, in the midst of heathen peoples. Through the influence of idolatry around them, there came to be a sad apostacy from the faith of their fathers.

Under Samuel a reformation was accomplished, which seemed to promise permanency. This, however, was neither radical nor pervasive. Sorrows filled the land. The people began to weary of looking for the *special interposition* of God, and to call for a *human leader* for the protection of their armies and treasures.

God "gave them a king in *anger*"; when, had they been obedient and patient, He would have given them a king in *mercy*.

Because Israel would not wait for God to choose for them a king in His own time, He gave them Saul, of their own choosing. They, however, found little comfort in him. His life was "*one long tragedy*." Human wisdom is often folly. That which we judge will be for our large advantage often proves our peril. There is no safety but in waiting for God to go before and lead. All our *least*, as well as our largest affairs, can be committed to Him in perfect confidence. The trouble with Israel, under Saul, was that he was not of God's choosing. The trouble with *us* often is, that we enter paths and take up work in opposition to the will of God.

II. NOTICE GOD'S CHOICE OF DAVID AS KING.

In the midst of the commotion and desolation of Israel, Samuel was commanded to

go to Bethlehem, and there anoint one of the sons of Jesse. The Prophet obeyed—following step by step the leading of God. After the offering of sacrifice the sons of Jesse were summoned. They passed before Samuel, from the eldest to the youngest. David, the “ruddy lad,” who seems to have been forgotten by his father, was recognized by the Prophet as chosen of God, and was anointed; when, immediately “the Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward.”

No explanation was given of the meaning of that anointing. Neither Jesse nor David understood it, though both must have had conception of some great honour indicated. Saul was ignorant of the anointing; he had nothing to do with the appointment of his successor. The choice was of God. Mighty changes were to take place in the rule of Israel; a mighty man was required. He was found. God always has instruments at hand for use. These are often unsuspected by the world; they are often found in obscure places; they are often led forth by unexpected methods. God has many ways of summoning and exalting His own. He is sure to find those whom He would crown. They who are chosen of God for special work in church or state need have no anxiety. Doing well one's work, whatever it be, is the surest way to find other work more influential.

III. NOTICE DAVID'S PREPARATION FOR THE KINGSHIP.

Saul had become apostate from God. He was then forsaken of God. Love and obedience are essential for the Divine favour. Forsaken of God, Saul could not bear his official burdens,—he could not throw them off. He was consciously unfit to reign; worse than all else, he was consciously weak and guilty. A kind of morbid melancholy, or insanity, possessed him. His palace became more like a prison than the proud residence of a monarch.

It was suggested that possibly music would soothe King Saul. David in his shepherd home had become skilled in the use of his harp; at his ordinary work in Bethlehem he had risen to great courage, and had learned to love the law of God with a perfect heart. He was summoned, if possible, to calm the king. Soon this lad—then but nineteen years of age—stood face to face with the melancholy monarch of Israel. David was full of blooming, hopeful life. Saul seemed like a dark spectre rising from the realm of death.

This shepherd boy struck his harp with a master hand. The king was calmed. Again and again, when his old melancholy gathered like an ominous cloud, David played for the king with the same happy result. Soon Saul came to love this young harper. He took him into the number of his pages and armour-bearers.

When the cure of Saul was effected, David seemed to have been forgotten. Having no more use for the harper, Saul loses love for him. Many a friendship dies with the demand for service. More discipline was needed; thus David retired to Bethlehem, and resumed there his pastoral work.

After awhile there was again the sound of war in Israel. The kingdom was threatened. Saul was terror-stricken, for he was consciously forsaken of God.

Across the valley of Elah, for forty successive days, Goliath stalked, challenging the army of Israel.

David appeared, sent by his father to inquire after his brethren. He saw Goliath on the plains. He heard his challenge. He felt that the insult was offered to Israel's God. His heart was stirred within him. He presented himself to the king as willing to meet the giant in singlehanded combat. There was sublime courage, and a sublimer faith. He had grown up into these graces through hardship. God had him in charge.

With the sequel of that sling-shot all are familiar. David's coolness, courage, heroism are to be accounted for from the fact that God was with him. He had a blessed sense of a present, personal Father, of which Saul knew nothing, and the army of Israel knew little. Up into this overmastering faith had risen along the years. All the while God had been training him for that scene, and for others on the wing, of which he never dreamed. David thenceforth became a public man. There was no more feeding of sheep for him,—no more obscurity.

There sprang up between him and Jonathan—Saul's first-born—a loving friendship. With this the king was delighted. Soon, however, jealousy began to burn in the heart of Saul. He thought he saw in David a dangerous rival. The evil spirit came on him again. Attempting to soothe the king with music, David was betrayed. Again and again the jealous and revengeful king sought his life.

Warned, however, by Jonathan, and assisted by Michal, his wife,—Saul's daughter,

—David escaped from place to place, often in great privation and *peril*. God was preparing him, through the persecutions of enemies and the treachery of friends, by a long and painful discipline, for the kingship of Judah, at Hebron. There he reigned seven and a half years, when the throne of Israel became vacant.

Purified in the furnace of afflictions and humiliations, grown strong in faith through wonderful deliverances and exaltations, he was ready for the place which God had made ready for him.

IV. NOTICE DAVID'S EXALTATION TO THE THRONE.

Saul was dead. Somehow it was understood that God had chosen David to succeed to the throne. A large delegation repaired to Hebron and offered him the crown. In former times David had been their leader, and had proved himself worthy to be their king. God had selected him. His fame was widespread. Saul's house was in ruins. The people recognised the King of Judah as in love with righteousness, as full of gentleness and magnanimity. He had won all hearts. There seems to have been no thought of other as their king. Thus they came to him with the words: "We are thy bone and thy flesh. When Saul was king, thou leddest out and broughtest in Israel; and the Lord said unto thee: Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over them." David remembered all the past; recognized this appeal; made a league in Hebron before the Lord, and was anointed king over all Israel.

His first work was to locate, build, and fortify his capital. Hebron, though central for the tribe of Judah, was far from the centre of the kingdom. Jerusalem was chosen. That city was then in the hands of the Jebusites, who derided all thought of taking it from them. They received the besiegers with mockery and scorn, insolently exclaiming: "Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither!" These blind and lame of the Jebusites were their idol-gods, set up on the walls, and in the recesses of the fortress. They trusted in the protection of these idols. But David had no fear of them. He gave the word to his men: "Whosoever smiteth the lame and the blind that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain."

The battle began. David's men took fort after fort; mounted the battlements; climbed over the walls; gained a glorious victory; and the name of Jehovah was exalted before the heathen.

The new king's next work was to repair and enlarge the city, which was henceforth to be called the "City of David." He built a strong wall round about, from the Castle Millo. Workman came down from Hiram, King of Tyre, with cedar trees, and aided in building a palace for the king. David's kingdom was established. He removed from Hebron, grew great, and the Lord of Hosts was with him.

David

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"They anointed David King over Israel."—2 Samuel v. 3.

It was at a dark time for Israel that the long-promised crown passed to David. Protracted in its duration, and most various in its features, had been the discipline by which he had been trained, not for this succession only; but for the higher dignity of being the prophet-king who should above all others be the type of Him Who should deliver not Israel only, but humanity from its enemies, and who should sit for ever on the throne of David.

For it was needed for this higher office that the character of David should gather into itself—so far as might be—all the various workings of the heart of man. This is the special attribute of the life and character of the royal son of Jesse. It was thoroughly and intensely human. In this lies the first great contrast between him and his predecessor. There is a hard, narrow separateness of soul marked in every line of the character of Saul; he is a wayward, wilful, self-determined man, well-nigh incapable of any real sympathy with others; parted almost as widely from his loving son Jonathan as he is from David, whom he hates as a rival. Such an one could learn little of the workings of that human heart which is so immeasurable in the multitude and compass of its tones. Deep as were his sorrows; he never knew the grace of contrition.

Thus, his dark heart is full of sullenness and suspicion, inviting the entrance of the Evil One, who came at his bidding, and closed with yet sterner bars all the avenues to his soul. In every one of these particulars David is the most complete contrast to Saul.

The second most distinctly marked point of contrast between the two characters is this: the one ever drew nigh to God, the just, the righteous, the Almighty, the all-living God, in Whom he lived and moved and had his being; the other, with all his better impulses and occasional illapses even of the spirit of prophecy, never knew God. A dark, unloving, superstitious fear, which bred neither humiliation, nor trust, nor true obedience, filled the one heart; a loving, trusting, delight in God, the true parent of humility, self-distrust, and obedience, possessed the other. The two different natures utter repeatedly the deep secret of the diversity of their inner being. Thus, when Saul had broken the commandment of God, delivered to him by Samuel, the slavishness of his religion comes out in the words, "I said, the Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal: and I have not entreated the face of the Lord. I forced myself therefore and offered a burnt-offering." Here again the lack of all true contrition breaks forth in the utterance, "I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people." In what sharp contrast with these stand the parallel utterances of David's heart after his great sin! "Thou desirest not sacrifice," etc. (Psa. li. 16, 17). Again, instead of thinking of the judgment of the "elders of his people," what a vision is given us of the undivided singleness with which his eye looks straight up to God in those marvellous words which have ever since set the tone of every penitent's return to God!—"Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned," etc. (Psa. li. 2-4). This was the central point of that character which made him the man after God's own heart. Here again the great image of the One Only Man Who was ever perfectly after the heart of God, is prefigured in His progenitor after the flesh. In the outlines, blurred in David by sin, we can see, as in some broken mirror, the image of One Who came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him.

The history of David's life is the record of his education in this high grace by the hand of God. It began in his earliest years. Separated by disparity of years from his seven brothers, whilst they lived in the world, he, according to the simple use of that early age, kept his father's sheep, upon the hill pastures near to Bethlehem. There, doubtless, the Angels of God met him; they who, in after time, revealed to shepherds—like himself abiding upon those grassy uplands of Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks by night—the good tidings of great joy, that in the city of David was born a Saviour Which is Christ the Lord. They bent their gaze upon this chosen youth, fair even to their eyes,—“ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look on,” as he wandered apart from men with his flock, communing with nature, drinking in the soft dews of prophetic inspiration, and breathing out the holy utterance of his untainted heart unto the God of Israel. Little did he dream of the future for which he was preparing. He had no desire to change that favoured portion for any other. God had set him there to keep those sheep in the wilderness. For God he kept them; with God he communed as he changed their pasture, beat off the lion and the bear, and led them to the water's side. Nor was there anything dreamy or enervating in his shepherd's life. Its solitariness braced up his spirit, and its dangers formed within him the habit of ready action based on simple trust in his God. When the lion and the bear came forth against his wilderness flock, and took a lamb for which he was accountable out of the fold, he went out after him and caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. It was to him but a natural act; he knew that he did it not in his own might, but in the strength of that Lord Who “delivered him out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear”; and in that presence the accidents of great and small, and the outside terrors before which his natural spirit would have quailed, vanished like the wreath of mist in the brightness of the sunshine.

So was his faith nurtured. Then there brake in upon it that sudden transition which carried him direct into the court of Saul. The moody madness of the wilful king had already increased upon him into fits which made his courtiers counsel him to seek the soothing of his troubled spirit by the calming influence of minstrelsy. He consents; and David is brought before him. He stands before the king, “cunning in playing, mighty and valiant, prudent in matters, a comely person, and one with whom the Lord is”: and when the fit falls upon the king, David takes his harp, and plays with his hand, and the distraught soul owns his power. Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. Then the inspired minstrel leaves the melancholy

court, and wanders again, rejoicing in his recovered liberty, upon the mountain-side, waking its echoes by the song of praise which he so well loved.

But this is not to last. War breaks out with the Philistines. The elder sons of Jesse follow Saul in the camp. To them the youngest is sent down by their old father, to carry them supplies, and to learn their estate. His journey was so ordered by his God that it brought him to the tent just as all Israel was trembling before the threatenings of the giant of Gath.

In those early wars the issues of the greatest battles, which were but a series of personal conflicts, turned often on the single strength and prowess of such a champion. For days the mail-clad giant insulted with his threatening taunts the hosts and God of Israel. The king offered noble rewards to any who would meet and overcome him in battle. But of all the chosen warriors of Israel not one was found to venture on the unequal fray; and so the champion of the uncircumcised waxed daily bolder in his insults and his boasts, as David passes through the host he hears the whispers of the trembling soldiery, and at last sees the Philistine giant as he stalks forth on his march of defiance. The heart of the young hero shudders as he hears those words of blasphemy. The trusting heart of God's servant could see no ground for fearing one who came forth to defy Jehovah. And he, with the naturalness of his character, at once speaks out his thoughts; and in the same simple energy of courage with which he had risen against the lion and the bear, he is ready to go forth against the champion of the uncircumcised. The rumour that one was found ready to take up the challenge is soon brought to Saul. He sends at once for the daring warrior, and finds, when he is ushered into his presence, that it is the minstrel youth whose harp erewhile had brought him rest. It was a strange interview; the warrior-king, himself well-nigh of giant stature, could not stand before the Philistine; and what in such an encounter could this young stripling do? To the self-confident man of this world, David's simple faith was well-nigh inconceivable; and the ever-ready discouragement of the voice of the flesh rises unbidden to those wilful lips. "Thou are not able to go against this Philistine." And when convinced, it may be by David's bearing, that the Highest had indeed inspired the venture, still the king would encompass him in armour before he trusts the mighty issue to his hands. David tries and rejects the armour. "I cannot go in these"—and strong only in Jehovah's might he goes forth, with nothing save his shepherd's equipment, against the champion of Philistia. Then the mighty arm of flesh is beaten down by unseen hands before Jehovah's servant, and David is brought back again to court, no longer as the mere minister to Saul's necessity, as one whose sweet minstrelsy can charm to rest the troubled soul, and drive away the evil spirit, but to be "set over the men of war." Still the contrast between these two men holds consistently out to the end. "This day," says David to the uncircumcised champion, "this day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand . . . for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands." In God, from first to last, is all his confidence. Saul, on the other hand, true to his original discouragement of the boldness bred by the divine afflatus falling on the hero heart—true to his seeking, when he doubtfully committed to David's hand the championship of Israel, to secure the defence of the royal armour for the stripling—enquires eagerly of Abner, the captain of the host, whose son is this youth; not from any want of recognition of David, but to ascertain whether his coming of any warrior lineage may justify some hope of a prosperous issue of the unequal conflict.

This mighty act of daring, for which a daily walk of faith in lesser instances had been preparing him, was the turning-point in David's life. He was now "set over the men of war"; he "was accepted in the sight of all the people"; the hand which had led him to the mountain sheep-folds now beckoned him on to the forefront of the nation.

Here is a new stage reached in his life's discipline. The affections of the king's son are set upon him, and his courtly life is brightened by the sunshine of that pure, disinterested love which has embalmed for all time the name of Jonathan. Need enough had he of such solace in the life he had to lead in that troubled court. The bitter jealousy of Saul's nature soon woke up against him, with all that intensity of hate which only jealousy can breed. Whether he had heard of that anointing by Samuel at Bethlehem, which must have brought back to him, with an indescribable bitterness of heart, his own anointing in the land of Zuph, we know not. But such knowledge was not needed to wake up this bitter envy. The Prophet had distinctly told him in the day of his sin, that the Lord had rent the kingdom from him, and had given it

to a neighbour that was better than he. And in David he could read the marks of such a man; for this young man was not only hymned in the triumphal songs of the daughters of Israel, and beloved by his own son, but accepted in the sight of all the people, and even of his own servants. Saul looked upon him and trembled. How strange was the destiny which had brought this dangerous rival into his presence! What evil might it not work against himself! And so his dark heart began at once to lay schemes for the destruction of his rival. This coward hatred of his sunken spirit vented itself first in plots to slay his fancied enemy by the hand of the Philistines, and then in undisguised attempts upon the life which seemed to threaten his sovereignty. By these last David is driven first from the court, and at length from the land of Israel. There gathers round him unbidden a band of outcasts, who, in their wild lawlessness, own the control of his master spirit: and thus is reached yet another stage in his manifold training. For now was forced upon him a friendly intercourse with Moab, and some of the tribes of Philistines. Slayer as he was of Goliath, yet as the enemy of Saul, they esteemed him the friend of Philistia, and Achish, the king of Gath, gave him royal shelter, expecting, doubtless, the succour of his heroic band in future conflicts with Israel. So he sojourned amongst the uncircumcised, to be called, like his greater Son, in the fulness of time, up out of his Egypt. Meanwhile, this tarrying in Philistia was another instrument of his training, for it nurtured that largeness of sympathy which he needed when he was the king of Israel. Provision for this had already been made in his descent from the Moabitish Ruth, but, in no way, probably, but by thus being forced to tarry with the Moabites and Philistines, could the shepherd of the hill-country of Bethlehem have practically learned the lesson which fitted him for his wider after-mission.

A mighty training, too, lay in that wild outlaw life for the knowledge and government of men. Nothing but the completest personal supremacy could hold such unruly elements under any species of command; and David, the unwilling head of such a following, learned in mastering them the secret of governing men, and knitting together their discordant hearts into an harmonious unity. By little and little that band had swollen in number; whilst names, great in after-history, began to be found in it. The prophet Gad, afterwards "the king's seer," had joined him at the cave of Adullam, and declared to him the oracles of God; shortly after, on the slaughter of the priests by Saul, Abiathar escaped, and "fled to David to Keilah, with the ephod in his hand." Thenceforward the life of Abiathar was intertwined with that of David, and "he was afflicted in all wherein David was afflicted." His brethren, too, and all his father's house, no longer safe from Saul's increasing violence, came down to him. His aged father and his mother he lodged, till he knew what God might do for him, with the king of Moab, upon whose hospitality, through Ruth, his mother, Jesse had hereditary claims. His brothers and his nephews, those hard, doughty sons of Zeruiah, joined his band, and, unshielded by that inward communing with God, which kept amidst such rudenesses the heart of David tender, learned there that familiarity with deeds of violence and blood which stained so deeply their after-lives. Great in that rugged band must have been the power of that passionate tenderness with which the heroic heart of David overflowed. Who can hear the voice of longing, out of the dry and desert cave of Adullam, for the water, which, from the well of Bethlehem, had slaked his young thirst, without understanding how the three worthies came to break through the host of the Philistines to draw the water out of the well for their beloved chief; or without feeling how more than ever they would have loved and followed him, when David "would not drink of it, but poured it out unto the Lord, because it was to him as the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy"?

A hard and restless life it was, to be hunted as a partridge on the mountain; so hard that at last it drove the chief into settling reluctantly his band across the borders of Israel, amongst the heathen people. A long waiting it was for the promise. Seven years had completed their tale since the anointing-oil was poured upon his head; and he was still an outlaw.

Still upon his soul was the bitterness of having been "driven out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord" (1 Sam. xxvi. 19), of being parted from all the covenanted acts of worship, and being bidden to "Go and serve other gods." What an unveiling have we of the bitterness of his soul; what an insight into his secret strength, in that Psalm which he poured out in the dark recesses of the Adullam cave, when, with a spirit overwhelmed with shame, he "cried unto the Lord with his voice: Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living; attend unto my cry, for I am brought very low;

deliver me from my persecutors. Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise Thy name." For a year and four months he had been living in that town of Ziklag, which Achish, the son of Maach, king of Gath, had given to him. Thither, on one of those many days of sadness, came a man out of the camp from Saul, with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. He came with the news of Israel's overthrow—of the death of Saul, and his beloved Jonathan; and to bear to him, as the designated king, the bracelet and crown of his predecessor. The messenger was an Amalekite, and he boasted to the exiled chief, in all the greedy expectancy with which his heathen heart craved for a royal largess, that his hand had ended the life of the wilful king. But he had misjudged utterly the temper of the son of Jesse. With the same unshaken reverence of devotion to the anointed of the Lord which had prevented him from avenging himself upon his persecutor, which had made his conscience smite him when he had but cut off the fringe of the king's garment, he now repudiates utterly the alleged deed of blood, and sentenced to instant execution the self-confessed murderer of the king; and then there breathed upon him the spirit of prophecy, and in a Psalm of lamentation he wept the end of Saul, and of Jonathan his son.

But other duties were now immediately before him. He enquired of the Lord, and the Lord said, "Go up to Hebron." Thither he repaired. Then came the men of Judah up to Hebron, the holy city of their tribe, where the patriarchs were buried, and anointed him king over the House of Judah.

Years of war followed with the adherents of the old dynasty. But David waxed stronger and stronger, and the House of Saul weaker and weaker, until the time came for fulfilling God's promise to him; and after this disputed reign of seven years and six months, when David was thirty-seven years old, "all the tribes of Israel came to him in Hebron, and anointed him king over Israel, and he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah."

Then was seen the fruit of all that long and hard discipline by which his royal heart had secretly been trained. In every respect, he was a great king—in war, in administration, in magnificence, in external prosperity. He was not like Saul, the ruler of a set of tribes; the kingdom was established in his hand. He begins by subduing the citadel of Jebus, and constituting Jerusalem, the city of David, a true, national metropolis. He brings up the ark, and sets it in his place. He establishes regulated forms of worship; he gathers together the company of singers, and of those skilled in all instruments of music, to exalt the praises of Jehovah, and from his throne of empire, under the inspiration of the Spirit of his God, he pours forth his sacred lyrics, to be sung by grateful hearts before the ark of the everlasting covenant. We can almost hear the creaking of the gates of the old fortress of Jebus, as their hinges swung sullenly open to admit the ark of the living God; we can almost hear that glad shout of the rejoicing king:—"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in . . . Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts; He is the King of Glory."

All this, moreover, was no formal recognition of the nation's God, but the real pouring forth of David's very heart before Him Who had ever been his refuge. How grand is the humility of the noble utterance with which he rebuked the pride of Michal's heart, who, the true daughter of her father, could not bear to see her husband humble himself before her God in the sight of all his people!—"It was before the Lord Which chose me. . . . to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. . . . And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight" (2 Sam. vi. 21).

In the like temper it was that he longed to build a house for God. As soon as the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, the king said unto Nathan the Prophet, "See, now, I dwell in the house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." But the great offering was not to be accepted from his hand. His son was to build the house. If there had been anything of self-will in David's purpose, this refusal might have chafed him. But no! he at once accepted the word of God as right, and humbly prepares materials for him at whose hands God would deign to accept the offering. "Who am I," he said, as he poured out his full breast before the Lord, "Who am I, O Lord God," etc. (2 Sam. vii. 18—20).

Great indeed must have been the effect upon his people of the king's loving devotion to his God! We may easily conceive what a change it was from the dark shadows cast on every side by the throne of Saul; from the dull torpor of the absent ark, and unvisited

tabernacle; from the silence of the voice of praise, and the dumbness of Jehovah's utterance; from the "God has departed from me, and answereth not." He did indeed by psalm, by song, and by example, wake up at once the nation's heart to praise their God. With this burst of internal religious life broke forth the power of Israel against her hereditary enemies. The king himself was "a mighty man, a man of war" (2 Sam. xviii. 8), and round about him were the comrades in arms, who had learned with him, in the experience of his years of exile, all the hard secrets of the camp: "They that be with him are valiant men." These "chief of the mighty men strengthened themselves with him in his kingdom" (1 Chron. xi. 10). Under them the army was now thoroughly organized; so that "David waxed greater and greater, for the Lord was with him." Around him, on every side, sped on the wave of conquest, sweeping over the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians, the Edomites, and Ammonites, until the promise of God was fulfilled, and he and Israel had rest from all their enemies round about them.

Within his kingdom, too, his throne was exalted, for "the Lord preserved him wherever he went, and he reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice unto all his people." How calm, bright, and glorious a mid-day of sunshine had that stormy, cloud-canopied morning ushered in at last! Surely, if the story ended here, every eye could see in it the parable and promise of the setting up, through persecution and martyrdom, of the kingdom of the Prince of Peace, the Son of David.

But here ends abruptly the typical resemblance, up to this point so startling in its exactness. One deadly element of future woe mingled itself with the establishment of the kingdom of David. His family was formed and governed on the model of the Eastern kings. Though the monarchs of Israel had been commanded not greatly to multiply wives, yet polygamy had never been absolutely forbidden, and David practised it freely.

Thus, when his throne had been thoroughly established, he brought into his family the curse of the Harem. An utter lack of discipline amongst his children was one of its first-fruits; and it brought yet deeper ill than even that; for it poisoned all the springs of family life and tainted it with ever-recurring impurity: working in him and in all around him its universal fruits of impurity, jealousy, hatred, incest, and blood.

David's own great sin, written with such plainness in the sacred record, opens this dark and dismal chapter of his history. Acts, which in the established Eastern life of the heathendom are too common for any special notice, are written down in the inspired record of the life of one who had known the living God with their own true names in the black entries of the catalogue of crime, as adultery and murder.

There is no more terrible, there is no more instructive portion of the Word of God, than this whole record. The long death-sleep of that once living soul; its awakening under the Prophet's voice; its deep repentance; its free forgiveness; its long, heavy, repeated, almost incessant chastisement, speak to every ear which is not altogether deaf, lessons of the holiness and truth, of the severity and love, of the justice and mercy of the Lord our God, which is borne perhaps with equal force in no other record of His ways with man. All David's after life is clouded by these chastisements. The sword never more departed from his house. The murder of his guilty first-born, Amnon; the treason of Absalom, and his miserable end; the rebellion of Adonijah, who had inherited all that partial love which had been so largely given to Absalom, his elder brother; and who, like Absalom, was a "very goodly man"; whom his father "had never displeased at any time," even "by saying, Why hast thou done so?" One after another, even to his life's end, these waves of sorrow broke over the mourning king, and woke from that harp, which of old had poured forth with such exuberance its joyful jubulations, the dirges of an almost broken heart. His flight from Absalom sets the full cup of his sadness most visibly before us.

How deeply stirred was that loving spirit when the messenger came to David from Hebron, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom!" How did the message wake up within him the echo of the old sentence, "The sword shall never depart from thy house!" More, as it seems, to prevent the deeds of blood and crime which he dreads for Absalom than from love of his own life, the king resolves to quit Jerusalem before the troops, headed by their unnatural leader, can approach to assault it. "Let us flee," says that brave old voice, "make speed to depart, lest Absalom overtake us suddenly and bring evil upon us and smite the city with the edge of the sword. So the king went forth and all the people with him." And what a departing it was! The very love and faithfulness of the rest lent a deeper note of tragedy to

Absalom's unnatural treason. To Ittai the Gittite, the king says, "Return to thy place . . . for thou art a stranger and an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us?" But the faithful retainer would not quit him against whom his own son conspired. "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth," is his answer, "surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, there also shall thy servant be." So he followed the king, and so did all the people, till all the country wept with a loud voice; so passed the king over the brook Kidron, and he went up, by the ascent of Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot.

So the great king fled from Absalom—fled only to return with his heart well-nigh broken by the life-long sorrow of his bitter grief for the "young man" who had been cut unrepentant down in the midst of his accumulated crimes of actual treason and meditated parricide.

Never, it would seem, during the eight years which his life yet lasted was this heavy shadow removed from his soul; for amongst his "last words" he breathes out, as from the bottom of a bruised heart, the lamenting cry, "Although my house be not so with God." Grey as an autumn evening ends the life of the great saint; of the man of love, of passion, of fervour, of inspired insight, of a woman's tenderness, and a hero's daring, and, above all, of a faith in God, so strong and deep that nothing in Heaven, or earth, or hell could part him from his Lord. Grey it was as the autumn evening when, amidst the thickening mists and darkening shadows, he said to his beloved Solomon, "I go the way of all the earth," and then laid down his reverend head and slept with his fathers; but bright as the beauty of the morning shall be that resurrection day when he shall rise up after the likeness of his Son, and of his Saviour, and be satisfied with never-ending joy.

Absalom

BY RIGHT REV. THEODORE DEHON, D.D.

"Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem," etc.—2 Samuel xvi. 15.

Absalom was the third son of David, by Maacha, the daughter of Talmai, King of Geshur. He appears to have been remarkable for the graces and beauty of his body, as well as for his illustrious descent. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him."

He is first introduced to us by the sacred historian, as avenging his sister's wrongs, by the murder of his eldest brother. He was prompted to this deed by a criminality on the part of Amnon, unparalleled, indeed, for horrible blackness, in the whole records of vice. But for resentment even of the greatest wrongs, to trample upon the sacred commands of God, in his anger to slay a man, yea, with premeditated and deceptive malice, to slay a brother, discovers thus early, that inconsiderate, unprincipled spirit, which strengthened with his age, and was the cause of his ruin. If, however, no other effects of this spirit were known, his youth, the precious nature of a sister's fame, a something irresistible in every bosom, would plead the extenuation of his rashness; and, with blushing silence, we should drop our tears over the dismal tale.

But it is seldom that a life which is uncontrolled by religious fear is marked with only one criminal act. The man who can be hurried by anger to murder a brother, will easily be induced by ambition to dethrone a father. Amnon's blood was white on Absalom's robes, in the comparison with the spots which afterwards defiled them.

Having fled because of his guilt to Geshur, in Syria, he abode there three years with the royal relations of his mother. Time had now soothed the wound in David's bosom; and forgetting the dead, he longed to embrace his living, his favourite child. His servants perceiving the tender anxiety which filled his heart, contrived by an ingenious stratagem, to obtain permission to bring the beloved fugitive back to Jerusalem. And "Absalom returned to his own house." Awful was the sentence of the law, which, as the minister of justice and of Heaven, the king was perhaps obligated to have executed upon the offender. It was important, too, to the virtue of his people, and to the reputation

of his government, that he should not be supposed capable of conniving at crimes, even in his own offspring. Therefore, though his son was not punished according to the severity of the law, he was not permitted for two years after his return to behold the face of his father. This was vexatious to the pride of the young prince. Through Joab, he remonstrated to the king, who then received him into his presence, and bestowed on him the kisses of affection and forgiveness.

One would suppose that henceforth we should see nothing but filial reverence, and a virtuous life in this hitherto careless character. Surely, Absalom, it will now be thy chief concern to cheer the declining age of the parent, whom thou hast so sorely grieved, and to atone by the regularity of thy future deportment for thy past misdemeanours. Alas! how slender are our hopes of those, in whom the religious principle has no place! How terrible is the progress of the wicked who have once given the reins to their will, and follow the guidance of their evil imaginations! Restored to favour, this unprincipled young man uses the riches of paternal bounty in procuring the gratifications of vain desires, and the attendants, force and equipage, which may add strength to his subtilty when he shall need it. The heir presumptive murdered, and his intervening brother dead, he aspires to the kingdom, and elate with his personal charms and interest with the people, fancies he can better manage its interests than the old king by whom it has so long been governed. With mad ambition, he resolves to depose his fond and venerable parent from the throne. With worse than mad ambition, with the vilest, blackest treachery, he plots his father's disgrace and destruction.

But how is it possible? Surely the people will cleave to the good king, to whom they owe such victories and prosperity? This vicious, inexperienced man, will never be able to drive the renowned David from his throne. So it should seem to sober reflection; but experience will tell us it is no difficult task. The breath of popular regard is varying as the wind. The multitude are ever open to complaint, and fond of change. Absalom has already some interest with the people, and with the cunning of his mind, and smoothness of his address, he may first blind, and then lead them as he pleases. Victims to the delusions of appearance, they became a prey to his designs, and verified what the whole history of man attests, that the smooth guise of deceit is oftener the mean, by which baseness accomplishes its purposes, than the fair argument of reason or the rough arm of violence.

When the passions are engaged in any evil pursuit, and the mind has given itself to its attainment, there is nothing at which it will stop. Truth or falsehood, affection or enmity, piety or depravity, is assumed by it with equal ease. The man who permits himself to depart from the path of rectitude, exposes himself to be hurried into every species of iniquity. Hebron was the place where Absalom had determined to rally his forces, and assume his usurped authority. It was necessary he should assign some reason for going there, and he scruples not to insult his God, and use piety for his plea. He entreated his father, that he might go to Hebron to offer certain vows to the Lord, which he had avowed to pay when he abode in Geshur, "if the Lord should bring him back again to Jerusalem." To such ignoble duplicity, to such ruinous falsehood, must the man be driven, who abandons the restraints of principle, and enlists in the prosecution of an evil work.

We may be surprised to think that in so short a time, this daring youth should be emboldened to attempt his enterprise. But there are always weak men to be the tools of such characters; and wicked men to be there abettors. There accompanied him many, who the narrative says, "went up in their simplicity, and knew not anything," and the subtle Ahithophel came from his city to aid the unnatural conspiracy. It was this Ahithophel who had been the confidential counsellor of David in his prosperity, and now joined himself to his foe. It was this Ahithophel, who persuaded Absalom to prostitute his dignity, his virtue, and every noble feeling, to the base accomplishment of his nefarious designs. It was he who could advise a son to the most certain ways of harassing and destroying a father, and when he found his counsels neglected, departed to his house "and hanged himself." How often have such counsellors become the victims of their own plots, and been left by the awful judgment of God to punish themselves for their own depravity.

By the aid of this evil man, new followers of Absalom were daily increased, and he succeeded so far as to compel the king to flee with his adherents from Jerusalem. And here there opens upon us one of the most affecting scenes which imagination

can picture or conceive. A venerable monarch driven from his city in the evening of life; a city, whose protector and ornament he had been; driven from it by his son; by the son of his fondest indulgence; a son, whose life he had spared when it should have been taken for justice, and who owed to him the strength and address which he turned against him. Ill-fated David! How now returned to thy ear the prophet's awful denunciation; "The sword shall never depart from thy house!" With what bitter remorse didst thou review the sin which brought all this evil upon thee. But he bore his adversity like a good man. With meekness he kissed the chastising hand, and sustained all the aggravating circumstances of his calamity. "Carry back the ark of God into the city," said he to Zadok; "if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back again, and show me both it and His habitation; but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am, let Him do to me what seemeth good unto Him." With sentiments like these the grieved parent left the city; "and Absalom, and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him."

With such designs, and counsellor, and leader, what might we not expect from this posture of affairs? It is happy, indeed, for men that there is Deity, Whose providence rules the events of life. By a wonderful interposition, the council of Ahithophel, which would most probably have been successful, was rejected, and the advice of Hushai, a friend of David, in disguise, was unanimously approved. This shrewd person exhorted him to assemble all his numerous adherents, "and go forth with them in person to the battle." Addressing himself to his vanity, he elated him with an anticipation of glorious achievement, and delighted the vain Absalom with the thought, that if his adversary were "gotten into any city," his zealous army would "bring ropes to that city, and draw it into the river, until there was not a small stone left."

And now the time approached when the Most High would bring upon this wicked, rebellious son, the vengeance which his crimes deserved. The armies entered the field, and Absalom with his hosts were defeated. Terrible was the slaughter among his people. He took to flight. But, as he rode in his haste through the wood, in which the battle was fought, "his head caught hold of the thick boughs of an oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth, and the mule that was under him went away." Apprised of his situation, Joab hastened to the place, and thrust him through with darts, and the adherents of the king took down his body and cast it into an ignominious grave. Unhappy end of an unprincipled life!

Not the victory over his enemies, nor all the gratulations of his friends, could solace David's sorrow for the melancholy fate of his rebellious child. The utmost wickedness had not exhausted his parental love. Like the Eternal Father over our fallen race, his pity yearned over the misfortunes of his son; and the profligate youth, as is generally the case, occasioned more grief at his death, than he had done good in his life.

From this interesting story, which we have thus imperfectly contemplated, we may derive many useful reflections.

In the first place, it teaches us all, and especially the young, the solemn importance of acquiring a control over our passions and desires. These, if left to be their own directors, may make us base, will make us miserable. To what duplicity and rashness; to what barbarity and guilt; to what unhappiness and ruin, was Absalom led by his ungoverned anger and ambition!

The story further teaches parents the solemn importance of implanting and cultivating in their offspring, those principles which are the only sure preservatives from debasement and crime. Happy for David, had he been more severe with his darling son. Sad were the fruits of his indulgence and neglect. Let parents learn from it, as they value their peace, and their offspring's felicity, to consider good principles and upright habits as the best gifts they can bestow upon their children.

We may, thirdly, learn from this history the barbarity and odiousness of filial disobedience. Who can behold the good king, and "sweet singer of Israel," driven in old age from his house and city, and read, that he "went up barefoot, by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up," without feeling his bosom rise indignant at the monstrous son, who could thus destroy a fond father's peace? When we hear the parent, unsubdued by the indignities of his child, saying to the captains of his hosts, as they went forth to the battle, "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom," who can help remarking the strength and disinterestedness of the affection which lives in a parent's breast, and feeling the sacredness of the duty which we owe to our fathers and mothers?

We may learn from our subject finally the folly and danger of priding ourselves in the possession of personal accomplishments and external charms. Had Absalom thought less of his beauty, he would have thought more of virtue. Had he trusted less to his cunning, he would have depended more upon his God. As if to punish this foolish vanity, external endowments, when unaccompanied by the excellences of the heart and mind, are generally sources of misconduct and disappointment to their possessor, and often are the causes of disgrace. Beautiful were the locks of Absalom; with pride he polled them every year, and weighed the produce after the king's weight. But, alas, vain youth! He was caught in the tree by his flowing hair, and the occasion of his pride was the instrument of his ruin. Let every one, then, be induced to build his complacency only on the excellences of an amiable heart and upright mind. Let us cultivate those principles and habits which shed a genuine, permanent, and protecting lustre upon life. Let us seek the glory which cometh from God only, and array ourselves in the beauty of that wisdom in which we may be truly lovely while we are here, and "shine as the stars for ever and ever" in another and a better world.

Absalom

BY REV. DE WITT S. CLARK, D.D.

"Absalom prepared him chariots and horses," etc.—2 Samuel xv. 1-15.

This single scene of a notorious life can hardly be considered alone. There were previous wild and foolish acts and imaginations involved in this, Absalom's later venture. Here vanity, violence, treachery, ambition, and selfishness wrought together unhindered. These made rebellion easy and natural.

I. THE FONDNESS FOR PERSONAL DISPLAY.

This child of the comely king David and the fair daughter of the Syrian monarch, was, like his sister Tamar, doubtless, of strikingly perfect form and feature. As Saul was noticeable for goodliness of stature, so he would seem to have been. His hair, luxuriant and glossy, was the wonder and envy of all. It was finer than Samson's. Knowing himself a handsome man, he took every advantage of such endowment. Aristotle's theory, published many centuries later, had already been heartily adopted by him, that "the right of command belongs to the beautiful." He thought himself the absolute authority over the lives and conduct of any with whom he had to do. Assassination, destruction of property, any thing to which he was inclined, was permissible, because of his unusual elegance of face and figure. Who could question the fancies of an Adonis, for divinity speaks in the exceptional physique? It was becoming that such royal blood should be royally apparelled and advertised. Ignorance of its presence and neglect was as bitterness and gall to the proud spirit. Parade and pomp made it thrive. So an imposing retinue was provided whenever he went abroad. He would eclipse all rival rulers in the splendour of his train. The curious crowd stared at the spectacle, and most of all at him. They cheered, and his greedy, empty nature was inflated with the tribute. At last the world had seen its ideal! "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised." Such head as he had, was turned thereby.

Often than not, it has been the bright and handsome youth who has gone to the bad. In the ranks of the criminal and the dissipated, one finds a surprisingly large proportion of those over whom in earlier years parents doted, whom friends congratulated upon their matchless charms of person. But it is not the paragon of bodily perfections alone who is betrayed by his very advantages. It is also that numerous class, filled with the conceit that they are fit models for sculptor or painter, who are subject to the same perils. Dress and lavish adornment and distinguished carriage are supposed to complete any thing lacking in their original furnishing. Sin likes to put on bright colours and polite demeanour. The silly coxcomb, the giddy girl, who spend much time before the mirror, and the rest of it in the hope of seeing their charms reflected in the admiration of all they meet, make smooth the path for corrupting influences to come in and rule them. They may not reach Absalom's villainy, but are on the way to it. When one thinks more of the outward appearance than of the

inward, incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, then comes he under the charge of being a Pharisee and a hypocrite. Making broad phylacteries and enlarging the borders of the garments—this old fashion—bodes no good. To do it, sometimes the actor has been forced to disreputable and unrighteous expedients, and has become another sad wreck along a course already thickly lined with them.

II. FONDNESS FOR INTRIGUE.

This was repeatedly manifest in Absalom's case, from the hour of his decision to have the life of Amnon to that in which Ahithophel planned with him in secret. He breathed the air of stratagems and was ill at ease unless some disaster was sweeping upon the unsuspecting. He delighted to set and spring traps upon the unwary. No rank or individual was too sacred for attack. His cruel soul fattened on the sufferings of others, whether parent or brother or stranger. That so much of the fiend can dwell in human breasts seems incredible. In its extreme form we rarely witness it, but in less obvious and offensive guise it widely prevails. That scheming whose success involves a corresponding loss or injury to another is very common. To fall back on the duty of each to care for, inform, and defend himself, does not in any sense justify him who takes advantage of his brother's ignorance or weakness. Business has far too much of this merciless character about it, till some declare it impossible on any other principle to maintain solvency. We are reminded that there is a fixed amount of treasure, trade, position, so that what one gets, another must want. There is not enough for all who would, so they who gain must do it at the expense of the rest. To this end, Spartan trickery is lawful. Subtle measures and doubtful statements are justified on the theory that the guileless should sharpen their wits. To be dull is to be victimized. Such method of supplanting and over-reaching is but a mild repetition of this unscrupulous Hebrew's acts. The same motive controls now as then.

He also pretended to a lively interest in the welfare of everybody. He was astir at an early hour to waylay any and all at the palace-gate who sought decisions in the disputes constantly arising among the people. This prince, so aristocratic in appearance, was a democrat of the democrats. None was too common for him to accost and offer to help. Noble, artisan, or slave, for one and all he had quick sympathies. To each he gave the gratuitous opinion that his case was worthy and should be speedily adjudged; but alas!—and the heavy sigh was breathed—there was none to regard it. The decay of justice in the realm was most deplorable! 'Would that he could hold, only for a little, the reins of power and enthrone again the genius of order and equity! It was an artful, malicious thought he lodged in the simple-minded comers to the imperial court. This plebeian spirit he further certified by refusing the homage offered his rank, and taking each by the hand, gave him a kiss instead. Nor did it burn the cheek thus profaned, but made the astonished citizen ready to join the standard of such a friend when once it was raised. So he "stole the hearts" which belonged to the indulgent, unsuspecting father.

Ah, how often is this farce still repeated! How much of political virtue is thus symbolized! "I, how I would serve the public interests, now neglected, were I elevated to the place this or that man holds. Reform! how it is bred in my bone! how I pray and labour for it day and night! How the evil-doer should suffer and the righteous be exalted, were I only given a chance! The town, the city, the state, needs me!" So wonted have we become to these pleas that we can hardly seriously listen to them. Professions of loyalty and ability are largely discounted, save in their case who have long and conspicuously and with much self-denial served the public.

None the less, multitudes are beguiled by the fair words, and the Absalom of to-day is as eager as the first to utter them. He becomes the blatant herald of the era of equality and goodfellowship, and poses ever as the champion of the leaderless, oppressed masses. When they wake, as they are sure to do after awhile, to the fact of having been duped and used simply as tools to compass his selfish projects, their scorn is hot and their condemnation withering.

III. FONDNESS FOR APPEARING RELIGIOUS.

In this instance it was an old vow made in the days of exile and which had not been fulfilled. He longed to pay it now in due form and measure. The Lord, Who had smiled upon him, was waiting to receive it. In Hebron he would make it good. There the banner of revolt would be more safely displayed, his forces rallied, and the conspiracy inaugurated. From that distance, the lever could be more effectually worked for overturning the throne; and all under the cloak of sacrifice and thanksgiving to Jehovah.

The "livery of Heaven" was never more shrewdly "stolen to serve the devil in." But, Absalom, yours is the

vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other;

you are "sunk down in the pit you made; in the net which you hid is your own foot taken; you are snared in the work of your own hands." Yours is not an exceptional case. All who follow in your footsteps are most likely to meet your fate. "O that they were wise; that they understood this; that they would consider their latter end!"

Absalom

BY REV. GEORGE R. LEAVITT.

"Absalom prepared him chariots and horses," etc.—2 Samuel xv. 1-15.

The monument to Absalom in the valley of the Kidron is buried deep in stones, cast against it by the Jews, as through generations they have passed, in token of their execration of this unnatural prince,—the counterpart, in the Old Testament, of Judas in the New. These stones are the true monument of Absalom. Let us add our tribute to make it a prominent and permanent landmark in religious history.

I. ABSALOM PERVERTED HIS NATURAL ADVANTAGES.

He was a gifted and handsome young man; he came of a well-favoured stock, and he was its flower. He had a fine head of hair; he paid strict attention to it. The people as they passed saw the ruddy and conscious young man; the daughters of Israel eyed him with admiring glances, and they said, "What hair!" Absalom was the nation's beauty, the nation's pride. And when he returned from Syria, and, aping the more splendid foreign manners, drove a chariot and horses, with liveried outriders, through the streets in which David was content to ride on a mule, never did he make such a dazzling sensation; never did his hair appear at such advantage; and the people, with murmured applause, said: "Would we had such a king as Absalom." Such words were only an echo of Absalom's purpose. He was not a mere coxcomb; he had an aim to which he made all natural advantages, and all the accessories of equipage and display, scrupulously subservient.

II. ABSALOM HAD A PERVERSE ENERGY OF CHARACTER.

He had persistency of purpose in a high degree,—a masterful trait. He was calculating and deep. He was a tenacious man. When Amnon wronged his sister Tamar he concealed his resentment for two years. He bided his time. When all was brought about to his mind he murdered Amnon. When he determined to undermine David's throne he showed a like steadfastness of resolution. He rose promptly in the morning to meet travellers coming into the city. He was thus early at his evil work,—not once or twice, but habitually. Perhaps no minor trait better illustrates firmness of purpose than habitual early-rising. A luxurious prince like Absalom would sorely miss the indulgence of the softer inclinations. But if his face was fair and his hand soft, and his hair curled and powdered with gold, his purpose was like steel. David rose early to pray; Absalom rose early to plot. Often they may have met and passed each other on their so different errands. This course of patient, insidious plotting Absalom continued for months, perhaps for years, until he was known throughout the kingdom as the poor man's friend.

III. ABSALOM PERVERTED THE STUDY OF HUMAN NATURE.

He studied the weaknesses of men. This is called by men of his base aims the study of men. The vices and the foibles are noted; the theory being that for one who would play effectively on this fine instrument what is especially necessary is a Wagnerian mastery of discords. The adventurer, the opposition politician, the quack doctor, the fortune-seeker, give themselves to Absalom's study of human weaknesses. Upon this knowledge their success depends. How admirable is the picture of Absalom at the gate. Who has not seen this coaxing, keen-eyed, flattering man, and felt the unctuous pressure of his hand and his nauseous kiss? Judas and Absalom are the Jews who kiss by calculation, so cleverly do they understand human nature!

IV. ABSALOM HAD UNLIMITED AND PERVERTED SELF-ASSURANCE.

What colossal audacity was that of Absalom, expressed in his treasonable sigh! "Oh!

that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me and I would do him justice." Who, then, is this aspirant for the mantle of Samuel? A criminal, forsooth; a murderer, who if the law should take its course would be at the bar, in the cell, on the gallows-tree, not on the bench; one whose present treason in this very utterance is a capital crime. And what does he offer to do? Does he know? Will he absorb into his own single hands all the functions of the government? Will he manage not only the general administration of justice, but all the details? Has he a brain that can consider every man's case,—an omnipresent and omnipotent hand to regulate all evils? Can he take burdens under which a Moses gave way, when they were far lighter? How preposterous! How utterly sensational! But he has reckoned well. As he makes the audacious claim, the people forget David and Moses and Samuel. They forget what Absalom is, what his qualifications are, what his training has been. They think of his chariot and his horses and his fifty outriders. They look at his hair, and recall what it weighed when last it was polled, and they say: Perhaps he is equal to it. He says he is. There is a degree, and, it is an amazing degree oftentimes, to which men will give confidence to bare pretension. Absalom's pretension was most shrewdly calculated.

V. ABSALOM PERVERTED THE CHOICE OF COUNSELLORS.

He chose sagacious but evil advisers; masterly, but unprincipled. Ahithophel was the oldest statesman in the nation. For some cause, perhaps for some misdemeanour, so it is inferred, he was temporarily out of favour at the court. Absalom improved the opportunity. He sent for Ahithophel. The bad old man came to him,—a man after his own heart. With all his confidence in himself, Absalom knew the value of a cool-headed, hard-hearted, experienced man of ready resource, familiar with affairs, and perfectly unscrupulous. It was this perception of the importance of counsel, and his sagacity in his plots, developed so carefully out of dark, protracted conferences, which made Absalom so dangerous. He was willing to get aid from any source. We must recognize the dangerous wisdom of the councils of this world. This wisdom is necessary to worldly success. If one heeds it, he greatly increases his prospects of accomplishing all worldly aims.

VI. ABSALOM PERVERTED THE USE OF RELIGION.

It has been suggested that when David rose early to pray he and Absalom may have met. It may be that the crafty prince first shared his father's devotions on the way to the gate. He saw the hold which religion had upon David and upon the nation. It would not answer for him to have the reputation of being irreligious; he must guard his religious standing. Accordingly, when his plot was sufficiently ripe for him to raise the standard of rebellion, he made a religious excuse for visiting Hebron. It was a natural one. He had made a vow, he explained, while he was in Geshur in exile for the murder of Amnon. It was a nicely calculated excuse. David believed in vows. He would look upon the handsome prince with heightened tenderness, touched by his manifest sensibility. He is going, he would say, in penitence for that cruel murder. Noble youth! And he kissed him and sent him away with his paternal blessing. And Absalom would say: I played that well! Ahithophel would further this religious bent. He had his finger on the nation's pulse. Absalom's messenger, when sent to summon him, found him engaged in sacrifice, retired to his country-seat, turning to the consolations of religion. How admirable!

Religion, in all times, is one of the readiest and most serviceable of cloaks. It especially serves the purposes of one who would win success in a religious community. Thus Satan comes along us disguised as an Angel of light.

VII. ABSALOM STUDIOUSLY SECURED THE SUPPORT OF GOOD MEN WITH THE SAME STEADY PERSEVERANCE.

He valued them, they could help him. He wanted the approval of such men at large in the nation. He despised them. He wanted them only as tools. But he knew the value to his cause of having men of character associated with his followers. He plotted with this as a part of his aim. And so successful was he that two hundred men out of Jerusalem followed him. They were chosen men. He had called them. He knew the weakness of prominent men. A little notice might capture them. And to these silly leading citizens some kind of carefully-framed invitation was sent requesting them to attend Absalom to Hebron to fulfil his vow. What could be more innocent? They fell into the net. "They went in their simplicity," in the vivid language of the historian. Cannot one picture to himself these two hundred simple citizens? "They

knew not anything." They might *not* know the deep-laid, treasonable plot. But they knew Absalom! Yet they went. This part of the plan was as successful as the rest. These two hundred solid men of Jerusalem have played a very important part in all political and social and religious history. They are the men who can be duped, whose lamb-like sincerity and innocence are needed to give character to mischievous and wicked enterprises. If they are only called by some flattering form of invitation, and made to feel that they are thus chosen, because they are *the* two hundred in all Jerusalem, how certain they are to follow the crafty leader who wants them only to use them, and who will open their eyes in due time, when it is too late.

These are the main points of the plan of Absalom. When all things were ready the standard was lifted. The trumpet sounded. The emissaries sent throughout the nation to lift the cry: "*Absalom reigneth in Hebron!*" shouted all together. The people were off their guard. They rushed into the rebellion. The tidings were borne to David. Stunned, overwhelmed, seeing in the event the retribution for his great sin, unwilling to expose Jerusalem to siege, he gave all up. He fled with a few trusted followers; he escaped for his life. The rebellion triumphed without a blow. It was one of the best considered and most brilliant enterprises in history. Absalom seemed to be repaid for all his self-denial, his unsavoury wiles, his clever hypocrisy, his long patience. He had reached his goal. He was king. Many men have succeeded as Absalom succeeded,—in politics, in professional life, in society. You may be tempted to cherish the low aim.

But look at Absalom at the goal of his hopes, in the full flush of success! Even then who would take his place? What had he accomplished but the fatal perversion of a life capable of greatest things? Look into his heart, and try to conceive the thoughts which must have been there in the very exaltation of his triumph. Then look again upon that sombre background, the forest of Ephraim, the figure of a man dripping with blood from many wounds, hanging and swaying in the awful twilight in the terebinth tree, suspended by his beautiful hair. Ah! *this*, then is a part of what Absalom was planning,—that part of which he was all unconscious, but the inevitable end!

Learn from this history how the noblest gifts may be perverted, industriously, painfully, fatally, to secure the false success. How are you using your life? your fine natural advantages? How are you treating the privileges of religion? Who are your chosen counsellors? For what main aim of life are you fostering deep, tenacious, self-sacrificing purposes? What a man Absalom might have been with a right aim! What a man you may become if you set your heart on the one end worthy of a Son of God,—to be a prince of the Kingdom of light; in love and loyalty and honour, to be one of the pillars of His temple.

Joab

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"Joab the son of Zeruiah."—2 Samuel viii. 16.

Joab was the eldest and most remarkable of the three nephews of David, the children of Zeruiah, David's sister. Their father is unknown. They all exhibit the activity and courage of David's constitutional character. But they never rise beyond this to the nobler qualities which lift him above the wild soldiers and chieftains of the time. Asahel, who was cut off in his youth, and seems to have been the darling of the family, is only known to us from his gazelle-like agility (2 Sam. ii. 18). Abishai and Joab, are alike in their implacable revenge. Joab, however, combines with these ruder qualities something of a more statesmanlike character, which brings him more nearly to a level with his youthful uncle; and unquestionably gives him the second place in the whole history of David's reign.

He first appears after David's accession to the throne at Hebron, thus differing from his brother Abishai, who was already David's companion during his wanderings. He with his two brothers went out from Hebron at the head of David's "servants," or guards, to keep a watch on the movements of Abner, who with a considerable force of Benjamites had crossed the Jordan, and come as far as Gibeon, perhaps on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary. The two parties sat opposite each other, on each side of the bank by

that city. Abner's challenge, to which Joab assented, led to a desperate struggle between twelve champions from either side, and the whole number fell from the mutual wounds they received.

This roused the blood of the rival tribes: a general encounter ensued: Abner and his company were defeated, and in his flight, being hard pressed by the swift-footed Asahel, he reluctantly killed the unfortunate youth. The expressions which he uses, "Wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? How then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?" imply that up to this time there had been a kindly, if not a friendly, feeling between the two chiefs. It was rudely extinguished by this deed of blood. The other soldiers of Judah, when they came up to the dead body of their young leader, halted, struck dumb by grief. But his two brothers, on seeing the corpse, only hurried on with greater fury in the pursuit. At sunset the Benjamite force rallied round Abner, and he then made an appeal to the generosity of Joab, not to push the war to extremities. Joab reluctantly consented, drew off his troops, and returned to Hebron. They took the corpse of Asahel with them, and on the way halted at Bethlehem in the early morning, to inter it in their family burial-place.

But Joab's revenge on Abner was only postponed. He had been on another of these predatory excursions from Hebron, when he was informed on his return that Abner had in his absence paid a visit to David, and been received into favour. He broke out into a violent remonstrance with the king, and then, without David's knowledge, immediately sent messengers after Abner, who was overtaken by them about two miles from Hebron. Abner, with the unsuspecting generosity of his noble nature, returned at once. Joab and Abishai met him in the gateway of the town; Joab took him aside, as if with a peaceful intention, and then struck him a deadly blow "under the fifth rib." It is possible that with the passion of vengeance for his brother, may have been mingled the fear lest Abner should supplant him in the king's favour. David burst into passionate invective and imprecations on Joab when he heard of the act, and forced him to appear in sackcloth and torn garments at the funeral. But it was an intimation of Joab's power which David never forgot. The awe in which he stood of the sons of Zeruiah cast a shade over the whole remainder of his life.

There was now no rival left in the way of Joab's advancement, and soon the opportunity occurred for his legitimate accession to the highest post that David could confer. At the siege of Jebus, the king offered the office of chief of the army, now grown into a "host," to any one who would lead the forlorn hope, and scale the precipice on which the fortress stood. With an agility equal to that of David himself, or of his brother Asahel, Joab succeeded in the attempt, and became in consequence commander-in-chief—"Captain of the host"—the same office that Abner had held under Saul, the highest in the state after the king. His importance was immediately shown by his undertaking the fortification of the conquered city, in conjunction with David.

In this post he was content, and served the king with undeviating fidelity. In the wide range of wars which David undertook, Joab was the acting general, and he therefore may be considered as the founder, as far as military prowess was concerned, the Marlborough, the Belisarius, of the Jewish empire. Abishai, his brother, still accompanied him as captain of the king's "mighty men." He had a chief armour-bearer of his own, and ten attendants to carry his equipment and baggage. He had the charge, formerly belonging to the king or judge, of giving the signal by trumpet for advance or retreat. He was called by the almost regal title of "lord," "the prince of the king's army." His usual residence (except when campaigning) was in Jerusalem; but he had a house and property, with barley fields adjoining, in the country, near an ancient sanctuary, called from its nomadic village "Baalhazor," where there were extensive sheep-walks. His great war was that against Ammon, which he conducted in person.

But the services of Joab to the king were not confined to these military achievements. In the entangled relations which grew up in David's domestic life, he bore an important part. The first occasion was the unhappy correspondence which passed between him and the king during the Ammonite war respecting Uriah, the Hittite, which led to the treacherous sacrifice of Uriah in a sortie. It shows both the confidence reposed by David in Joab, and Joab's too unscrupulous fidelity to David. From the possession which Joab thus acquired of the terrible secret of the royal household, has been dated, with some probability, his increased power over the mind of the king.

The next occasion on which it was displayed was in his successful endeavour to reinstate Absalom in David's favour, after the murder of Amnon. It would almost seem as if he had been guided by the effect produced upon the king by Nathan's parable. A similar apologue he put into the mouth of a "wise woman of Tekoah." The exclamation of David on perceiving the application intimates the high opinion which he entertained of his general, "Is not the hand of Joab in all this?" A like indication is found in the confidence of Absalom that Joab, who had thus procured his return, would also go a step further and demand his admission to his father's presence. Joab, who evidently thought that he had gained as much as could be expected, twice refused to visit the prince, but having been entrapped into an interview by a stratagem of Absalom, undertook the mission and succeeded in this also.

The same keen sense of his master's interests that had prompted this desire to heal the breach in the royal family ruled the conduct of Joab no less, when the relations of the father and son were reversed by the successful revolt of Absalom. His former intimacy with the prince did not impair his fidelity to the king. He followed him beyond the Jordan, and in the final battle of Ephraim, assumed the responsibility of taking the rebel prince's dangerous life in spite of David's injunction to spare him, and when no one else had courage to act so decisive a part. He was well aware of the terrible effect it would have on the king, and on this account possibly dissuaded his young friend Ahimaaz from bearing the news; but when the tidings had been broken, he had the spirit himself to rouse David from the frantic grief which would have been fatal to the royal cause. His stern resolution (as he had himself anticipated) well nigh proved fatal to his own interests. The king could not forgive it, and went so far in his unreasonable resentment as to transfer the command of the army from the too faithful Joab to his other nephew, Amasa, the son of Abigail, who had even sided with the insurgents. In like manner he returned only a reproachful answer to the vindictive loyalty of Joab's brother, Abishai. Nothing brings out more strongly the good and bad qualities of Joab than his conduct in this trying crisis of his history. On the one hand, he remained still faithful to his master. On the other hand, as before in the case of Abner, he was determined not to lose the post he so highly valued. Amasa was commander-in-chief, but Joab had still his own small following of attendants; and with him were the mighty men commanded by his brother Abishai, and the body-guard of the king. With these he went out in pursuit of the remnants of the rebellion. In the heat of pursuit he encountered his rival Amasa, more leisurely engaged in the same quest. At "the great stone" in Gibeon, the cousins met. Joab's sword was attached to his girdle, by design or accident it protruded from its sheath; Amasa rushed into the treacherous embrace to which Joab invited him, holding fast his sword by his own right hand, whilst the unsheathed sword in his left hand plunged into Amasa's stomach; a single blow from that practised arm, as in the case of Abner, sufficed to do its work. Joab and his brother hurried on to discharge their commission, whilst one of his ten attendants stayed by the corpse, calling on the royal party to follow after Joab. But the deed produced a frightful impression. The dead body was lying in a pool of blood by the roadside; everyone halted as they came up, at the ghastly sight, till the attendant dragged it out of the road, and threw a cloak over it. Then, as if the spell was broken, they followed Joab, now once more captain of the host. He, too, when they overtook him, presented an aspect long afterwards remembered with horror. The blood of Amasa had spurted all over the girdle to which the sword was attached, and the sandals on his feet were red with the stains left by the falling corpse. But, at the moment, all were absorbed in the pursuit of the rebels. Once more a proof was given of the wide spread confidence in Joab's judgment. In the besieged town of Abel Bethmaachah, far in the north, the same appeal was addressed to his sense of the evils of an endless civil war, that had been addressed to him years before by Abner, near Gibeon. He demanded only the surrender of the rebel chief, and on the sight of his head thrown over the wall, withdrew the army and returned to Jerusalem.

His last remonstrance with David was on the announcement of the king's desire to number the people. "The king prevailed against Joab." But Joab's scruples were so strong that he managed to avoid numbering two of the tribes, Levi and Benjamin.

There is something mournful in the end of Joab. At the close of his long life, his loyalty, so long unshaken, at last wavered. "Though he had not turned after Absalom, he turned after Adonijah." This probably filled up the measure of the king's long

cherished resentment. We learn from David's last song that his powerlessness over his courtiers was even then present to his mind (2 Sam. xxiii. 6, 7), and now on his death-bed, he recalled to Solomon's recollection the two murders of Abner and Amasa, with an injunction not to let the aged soldier escape with impunity.

The revival of the pretensions of Adonijah after David's death, was sufficient to awaken the suspicions of Solomon. The king deposed the high priest Abiathar, Joab's friend and fellow conspirator,—and the news of this event at once alarmed Joab himself. He claimed the right of sanctuary within the curtains of the sacred tent, under the shelter of the altar at Gibeon. He was pursued by Benaiah, who at first hesitated to violate the sanctuary of the refuge; but Solomon urged that the guilt of two such murders overrode all such protection. With his hands on the altar, therefore, the grey-headed warrior was slaughtered by his successor, the body was carried to his house "in the wilderness," and there interred. He left descendants, but nothing is known of them.

Solomon

BY REV. DAVID THOMAS, D.D.

"Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord," etc.—1 Kings xi. 6.

These words are a sententious and significant summary of the life of one of the greatest of men. Solomon lived about 1,000 years before the birth of Christ. His name at first, given to him by Nathani, the Prophet, was Jedidiah, signifying the beloved of the Lord. Of his childhood and youth we have no information, but the fact that David with devout confidence resigned the kingdom into his hand, authorises the conclusion that he had been well instructed in the history, the politics, and the religion of his country.

The leading facts of his life are too well known to require their narration here. Our purpose now is to draw out some of the lessons which his life involves. The highest end of God in His dealing with man is to teach him, and the most effective forms in which He gives His lessons are the facts of human experience. He often raises up men whose lives are fraught with high instructions. Human history is His school and there are but few books in that school, either so magnificent in their exterior or priceless in their contents, as the life of Solomon.

I. THE CO-EXISTENCE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THE SAME HUMAN SOUL.

There was much spiritual good in this man. In early life, we are told that "he loved the Lord, and walked in all the statutes of David his father." His unwearied and self-sacrificing labours in rearing a temple for Jehovah; the sentiments of humanity, gratitude and adoration, which he expressed at its dedication; his appreciation of wisdom as the chief good, and the glorious counsels that he propounded in Proverbs to his age; prove beyond doubt that in his heart there were the germs of many virtues, and the spirit of noble actions. But alas! there was much within him that was bad also; vice as well as virtue had a place and a sphere in his great soul. The revenge he displayed in the murder of Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei; his love for strange women, and his support of a harem of carnality, unsurpassed by the most voluptuous monarch of any time, and his encouragement at times of idolatrous worship, reveal too clearly, the fact that evil had a strong hold within him. So long as we are in this world, this is more or less the case with the best of us; evil is not perhaps entirely subdued, until this "mortal puts on immortality." In Heaven evil is not found in alliance with good in any heart, nor in hell is good found in alliance with evil. Their co-existence is only in the human heart, whilst here. This fact should always be recognized by us in estimating the characters of our fellow-men. A man is not to be pronounced utterly bad because he has committed a wrong, nor completely good because he has performed some virtuous deeds. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou us from secret faults."

II. THE ENERGY OF THE DEGENERATING TENDENCY IN HUMAN NATURE.

There seems to be in all men a something, call it original sin, depravity, or what you like, which urges to the wrong; a law in the members warring against the laws of the Spirit. You see this force in the case of Solomon. It was in him stronger than three

things. It was stronger than the influence of parental piety. Many were the pious counsels, we may rest assured, that David gave his son, and many a pious prayer did he offer on his behalf. How touching was that last address he gave him just before "he fell asleep, having served his generation by the will of God." "I go the way of all the earth," said he, "be thou strong, therefore, and show thyself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord thy God to walk in His way, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies." It is natural to suppose that the religious impressions which his father had made upon his young nature were deep and strong, but strong as they were the depraved element for a time overbore them all. The degenerating force within him proved stronger even than his own religious convictions. The prayer which he offered at the outset of his reign, "Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart," the many devout prayers which he offered and the holy truths which he propounded, show that he had religious convictions of no ordinary depth and force. Yet the evil principle within him overcame them for a time, and dragged him down into the depths of depravity. It proved stronger, moreover, than his own clearest conceptions of duty. No man knew what duty was better than he; his many thousand proverbs show that the realm of obligation was clear enough to him. Let us be on our guard against this mighty degenerating force within us. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Let our constant prayer be, "Hold Thou us up and we shall be safe."

III. THE UTTER INSUFFICIENCY OF ALL EARTHLY GOOD TO SATISFY THE MIND.

"I said in my heart, go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold this also is vanity." Read a description of Solomon's great earthly possessions, and the vast apparatus he had constructed for supplying himself with pleasure. Eccles. ii. Men say, "Give us wealth and we shall be happy." The riches of Solomon were enormous. Wealth flowed copiously into his coffers. The Kings of Tarshish and the isles and the Kings of Sheba offered to him their gifts. Yet he says, "Vanity of vanities." Others say, "Give us social position and we shall be happy." Solomon had this in an eminent degree; he sat on a throne of "ivory and gold," his people bowed at his footstool; he was the idol of his age. Princes came from afar to witness his glory and render him homage; yet, notwithstanding this he says, "All is vanity."

Others say, "Surround us with the beautiful in art and nature, and we shall be happy; fill our halls with paintings and sculpture; let music pour her magic strains upon our ear." Solomon had all this, vineyards, and gardens, and orchards, fruitful trees and artistic streams, men singers and women singers, and musical instruments of all sorts; yet he says, "Vanity of vanities." Others say, "Give us knowledge and we shall be happy; our natures crave for an acquaintance with the doctrines of nature and the philosophy of existence." I know that the tree of knowledge had a large variety of delicious fruits, but Solomon had knowledge in an eminent degree. "God gave him wisdom and understanding, much and largeness of heart, even as the sand which is on the seashore"; he was a sage, a poet, and a naturalist; he spake 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. "He spoke of trees, from the cedars, which are in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop which springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, of fowls, of creeping things, and of fishes"; yet this man says: "I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and all the labour that I had laboured to do, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there is no profit under the sun." The fact is, the world has nothing wherewith to fill and satisfy the soul. Give it all the beauty, all the wealth of the material universe, and it will be empty without God.

IV. THE SUPERIORITY OF TRUE THOUGHTS TO ALL THE OTHER PRODUCTIONS OF MAN.

Solomon was an active man, and accomplished many material works while here; but what were they all compared with his thoughts contained in the Book of Proverbs? What are they as to their *utility*? What good did all his buildings, his fleets, his ornaments, his gardens, and his musicians do, compared with his ideas? His thoughts have been of priceless worth to men of a thousand generations. How many careless minds have they roused to action, how many doubts have they scattered, how many noble deeds have they stimulated, how many souls have they guided safely over the voyage of life! What are they as to their *duration*? Where now is his throne of "ivory and gold"? Where the magnificent temple, with its precious gold and goodly stones? Where the gorgeous palace, which after fourteen years' labour he completed for himself? Where are his costly ornaments? All gone to dust. But his thoughts are here. Yes,

and here they will live, and spread, and work as generations come and go, and as kingdoms rise and break as bubbles on the stream.

Solomon

BY REV. F. W. ROBERTSON, M.A.

"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" etc.—Nehemiah xiii. 26.

The career of Solomon is a problem which has perplexed many, and is by no means an easy one to solve. He belongs to the peculiar class of those who begin well, and then have the brightness of their lives obscured at last. His morning sun rose beautifully; it sank in the evening, clouded, and dark with earthly exhalations,—too dark to prophesy with certainty how it should rise on the morrow. Solomon's life was not what religious existence ought to be. The Life of God in the soul of man ought to be a thing of perpetual development; it ought to be more bright, and its pulsations more vigorous every year. Such certainly, at least to all appearance, Solomon's was not. It was excellence, at all events, marred with inconsistency. It was original uprightness disgraced by a fall, and that fall so prolonged and signal that it has always been a disputed question among commentators, whether he ever rose from it again at all. But the passage which I have selected for the text, in connection with one or two others, seems to decide this question. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" that is, marriage with foreign wives? "Yet among many nations was there no king like him who was beloved of his God." Now, there can be no doubt of the view given us in this verse. Six hundred years after Solomon had been sleeping in earthly dust, when all contemporaries were dead, and all personal feelings had passed away, when History could pronounce her calm verdict upon his existence as a whole, Nehemiah, in this passage, gave a summary of his character. He speaks to us of Solomon as a saint,—a saint in whom saintliness had been wonderfully defaced,—imperfect, tempted, fallen; but still ranked among those whom God's love had pre-eminently distinguished.

I. THE WANDERINGS OF AN ERRING SPIRIT. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?"

The history of the text is this,—Nehemiah discovered that the nobles of Judah, during the captivity, when law and religious customs had been relaxed, had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; and then, in his passionate expostulation with them, he reminds them that it was this very transgression which led to the fall of the monarch who had been most distinguished for God's favour. In the whole Jewish system, no principle was more distinct than this,—the separation of God's people from partnership with the world. Exclusiveness was the principle on which Judaism was built. The Israelites were not to mix with the nations: they were not to marry with them: they were not to join with them in religious fellowship or commercial partnership. Everything was to be distinct,—as distinct as God's service and the world's. And it was this principle which Solomon transgressed. He married a princess of Egypt. He connected himself with wives from idolatrous countries,—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites. And then Nehemiah's argument, built on the eternal truth that friendship with the world is enmity with God, is this,—*"Did not Solomon sin by these things?"*

We are to be separate, brethren, from the world. Mistake not the meaning of that word. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. *Our* world is not that. The world is that collection of men in every age who live only according to the maxims of their time. The world may be a profligate world, or it may be a moral world. All that is a matter of accident. Our world is a moral world. The sons of our world are not idolaters, they are not profligate, they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. Their society is more pleasing, more lively, more diversified in formation than religious society. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dulness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. No marvel if Solomon felt the superior charms of the accomplished Egyptian and the wealthy

Tyrian. His Jewish countrymen and countrywomen were but homely in comparison. What wonder if the young monarch felt it a relaxation to emancipate himself from the thralldom of a society which had little to interest his grasping and restless mind, and to throw himself upon a companionship which had more of refinement, and more of cultivation, and more of that enlargement of mind which his own gifted character was so fitted to enjoy?

It is no marvel, brethren. It is all most natural, all most intelligible,—a temptation which we feel ourselves every day. The brilliant, dazzling, accomplished world,—what Christian with a mind polished like Solomon's does not own its charms? And yet now, pause. Is it in wise Egypt that our highest blessedness lies? Is it in busy, restless Sidon? Is it in luxurious Moab? No, my Christian brethren. The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the Israel of God. His home is in that deep, unruffled tranquillity which belongs to those who are trying to know Christ. And when a Christian will not learn this; when he will not understand that in calmness, and home, and work, and love his soul must find its peace: when he will try keener and more exciting pleasures; when he says, I must taste what life is while I am young, its feverishness, its strange, delirious, maddening intoxication, he has just taken Solomon's first step, and he must take the whole of Solomon's after and most bitter experience along with it.

The second step of Solomon's wandering was the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure. And a man like Solomon cannot do anything by halves. What he did, he did thoroughly. No man ever more heartily and systematically gave himself up to the pursuit. If he once made up his mind that pleasure was his aim, then for pleasure he lived.

There is a moral to be learnt from the wildest worldliness. When we look on the madness of life, and are marvelling at the terrible career of dissipation, let there be no contempt felt. It is an immortal spirit marring itself. It is an infinite soul, which nothing short of the Infinite can satisfy, plunging down to ruin and disappointment. Men of pleasure! whose hearts are as capable of an eternal blessedness as a Christian's, that is the terrible meaning and moral of your dissipation. God in Christ is your only Eden, and out of Christ you can have nothing but the restlessness of Cain; you are blindly pursuing your destiny. That unquenched impetuosity within you might have led you up to God. You have chosen instead that your heart shall try to satisfy itself upon husks.

There was another form of Solomon's worldliness. It was not worldliness in pleasure, but worldliness in occupation. He had entered deeply into commercial speculations. He had alternate fears and hopes about the return of his merchant ships on their perilous three-years' voyage to India and to Spain. He had his mind occupied with plans for building. The architecture of the Temple, his own palace, the forts and towns of his now magnificent empire, all this filled for a time his soul. He had begun a system of national debt and ruinous taxation. He had become a slaveholder and a despot, who was compelled to keep his people down by armed force. Much of this was not wrong; but all of it was dangerous. It is a strange thing how business dulls the sharpness of the spiritual affections. It is strange how the harass of perpetual occupation shuts God out. It is strange how much mingling with the world, politics, and those things which belong to advancing civilization, things which are very often in the way of our duty, deaden the delicate sense of right and wrong. Let Christians be on their guard by double prayerfulness when duty makes them men of business or calls them to posts of worldly activity. Solomon did things of questionable morality which he never would have done if he had not had the ambition to distinguish himself among the princes of this world. Business and worldliness dried up the springs of his spirituality. It was the climax of Solomon's transgression that he suffered the establishment of idolatry in his dominions.

II. GOD'S LOVING GUIDANCE OF SOLOMON IN THE MIDST OF ALL HIS APOSTASY. My Christian brethren, in the darkest, wildest wanderings, a man to whom God has shown His love in Christ is conscious still of the better way. In the very gloom of his remorse, there is an instinctive turning back to God. It is enumerated among the gifts that God bestowed on Solomon, that He granted to him "largeness of heart." Now that largeness of heart which we call thoughtfulness and sensibility, generosity, high feeling, marks out, for the man who has it, a peculiar life. Life becomes an intense thing: if there be guilt, then his life will be desolating remorse; if love, then the very ecstasy of blessedness. But a cool, commonplace life he cannot have. According to Scripture

phraseology, Solomon had a great heart; and therefore it was that for such an one the discipline which was to lead him back to God must needs be terrible. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men." That was God's covenant, and with tremendous fidelity was it kept.

You look to the life of Solomon, and there are no outward reverses there to speak of. His reign was a type of the reign of the power of peace. No war, no national disaster, interrupted the even flow of the current of his days. No loss of a child, like David's, pouring cold desolation into his soul,—no pestilences nor famines. Prosperity and riches, and the internal development of the nation's life, that was the reign of Solomon. And yet, brethren, with all this was Solomon happy? Has God no arrows winged in Heaven for the heart, except those which come in the shape of outward calamity? Is there no way that God has of making the heart gray and old before its time, without sending bereavement, or loss, or sickness? Has the Eternal Justice no mode of withering and drying up the inner springs of happiness, while all is green and wild and fresh outwardly? We look to the history of Solomon for the answer.

The first way in which his aberration from God treasured up for him chastisement, was by that weariness of existence which breathes through the whole Book of Ecclesiastes. My younger brethren, that saddest book in all the Bible stands before you as the beacon and the warning from a God Who loves you, and would spare you bitterness if He could. Follow inclination now, put no restraint on feeling,—say that there is time enough to be religious by and by,—forget that now is the time to take Christ's yoke upon you, and learn gradually and peacefully that serene control of heart which must be learnt at last by a painful wrench,—forget all that, and say that you trust in God's love and mercy to bring all right, and then that Book of Ecclesiastes is your history. The penalty that you pay for a youth of pleasure is, if you have anything good in you, an old age of weariness and remorseful dissatisfaction.

But now, lastly, we have to remark this, that the Love of God brought Solomon through all this to spiritual manhood. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." In this, brethren, we have the evidence of his victory. Doubt and imprisonment and worldliness have passed away, and clear activity, belief, freedom, have taken their place. It was a terrible discipline, but God had made that discipline successful. Solomon struggled manfully to the end. The details of his life were dark, but the life itself was earnest; and after many a fall, repentance, with unconquerable purpose, began afresh. And so he struggled on, often baffled, often down, but never finally subdued; and still with tears and indomitable trust, returning to the conflict again. And so, when we come to the end of his last earthly work, we find the sour smoke, which had so long been smouldering in his heart and choking his existence, changed into bright, clear flame. He has found the secret out at last, and it has filled his whole soul with blessedness. God is man's happiness. "Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

"Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin? and yet there was no king like him who was beloved of his God." Let that, brethren, be to us a truth not to teach carelessness, but thankfulness. Oh! trembling believer in Christ, are you looking into the dark future and fearing, not knowing what God will be to you at the last? Remember, Christ "having loved His own who are in the world loved them to the end." Your salvation is in the hands of Christ; the everlasting arms are beneath you. The rock on which your salvation is built is love, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.

Solomon

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" etc.—Nehemiah xiii. 26.

Solomon was born in Jerusalem of Bathsheba. David gave him the name of Solomon, or Peaceable, because of the word of the Lord concerning him, which foretold his birth to David, and gave him that name, to signify that God would give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. God manifested His favour

towards the child after his birth by commissioning Nathan the Prophet to give him the additional name of Jedidiah, or the Lord's beloved. He grew up in wisdom and godliness, and formed an exception to the general character of the sons of David. He does not come forward in history until the close of his father's reign. At that time, David being old, and laid up with his infirmities, Adonijah, the eldest, since Absalom's death, of the sons born in Hebron, resolved to seize upon the throne. His presumption, like Absalom's, had been fed by his father's overweening fondness, who would never displease him, and his beauty, like Absalom's, had procured him popularity. Joab, the great Captain, and Abiathar, the High Priest, assisted in this disgraceful conspiracy. By means of the faithful Nathan, the Prophet, David was aroused to a sense of what was going on. He immediately charged Zadoc and Nathan to anoint Solomon at Gihon, in Jerusalem, and proclaim him king by sound of trumpet. Adonijah was obliged to submit, and Solomon was thus elected both into the partnership and succession of David's kingdom. The old king did not long survive. On his death-bed he gave Solomon various injunctions respecting particularly the way in which he was to deal with certain persons who had troubled his own reign, and were well inclined to disturb that of his son also. All these Solomon punctually executed on coming to his sole sovereignty. Joab and Abiathar suffered merited punishment. The first was put to death at the altar to which he had fled for refuge. The second was deposed, and Zadoc put into his office. Thus Solomon almost immediately possessed in peace the kingdom which his father David had built up, under God, by such laborious and long struggles. It occupied a country which both to the eye and for food was the most delicious portion of earth. The Philistine who had so lately bearded his predecessors was humble and peaceable. The Edomite, the Moabite, the Ammonite, those names of former terror, now reposed quietly under his dominion, which extended from Gaza, on the Egyptian border, to Thapsacus on the Euphrates, and formed the predominant monarchy of Western Asia. The nation had found after its long wanderings and reverses a settled resting-place, and dwelt safely, every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, from Dan to Beersheba. Alas! both king and people soon forgot the Giver in the abundance of His gifts, and while the ox knew his owner, and the ass his master's crib, Israel would not know, God's people would not consider.

An ominous speck or two discloses itself at the commencement of his reign. He took a wife from the idolatrous house of Pharaoh. She, however, might have become a convert to the true faith. King and people also still violated the law of Moses by sacrificing on high places: since God had limited His presence to the tabernacle, this was a presumptuous temptation of Him. But man has a perverse love for any thing novel and forbidden in preference to what is established and bidden; and whenever he feels a more than ordinary excitement, or thinks to do God a more than ordinary service, nothing ordinary, be it even ordained by God Himself, will content him. Some excuse may be found for this unlawfulness at the present time from the separation of the ark and its tabernacle. The former was on Mount Sion, whither David had brought it, the latter, with all its holy furniture, was at Gibeon, which was the principal high-place. Thus there was no place of worship exactly corresponding to that which Moses had commanded to be the only one. It was at Gibeon that Solomon, after having offered a splendid sacrifice of a thousand burnt offerings, was vouchsafed a Divine vision. The Lord appeared to him in a dream at night, and said, "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon, expressing a deep sense of the responsibility of his station, requested understanding to rule the people committed to his charge. Such was the wise and manly answer made by a youth of eighteen. On thinking of what almost all youths in his circumstances, with his strong passions, his love of magnificence, his possession of the proudest throne in Western Asia, would ask, we cannot but be struck with admiration of his modesty and wisdom, and of that diffidence in himself which turned him in confidence to God. He was not one of those feeble luxurious youths who have looked upon empire merely as the irresponsible and unlimited enjoyment of their lusts, on the government of others as the blest occasion of throwing off the government of themselves, on the supremacy of their will over fellow man as the subjection of it to their own passions. He took upon himself the royal power as God's vicegerent upon earth, as His appointed instrument of blessedness to the people whom He had chosen. Thus he was guided by heavenly principles, which alone can triumph in the conflict which a monarch has to undergo. God gave him "a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like him before him,

neither after him should any arise like unto him." God also proved in him the rule which His Blessed Son afterwards laid down, when He commanded us to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, and then all earthly blessings shall be added to it. Because Solomon had asked this heavenly gift only, and mentioned none earthly, God gave him the earthly also. "I have also given thee (He says) that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days."

From the tabernacle at Gibeon, Solomon returned to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, which was followed by a feast to all his servants. Thus he consecrated the threshold of his reign, and under these happy auspices commenced his course. He made God the beginning, happy if he had made Him also the end of all his doings. Gloriously indeed did he set out. The neighbouring princes sent their congratulations, and renewed with him the friendship they had made with his father. Among them was one who did him essential service in the grand work of his reign. This was Hiram, king of Tyre, a man of a truly princely spirit. The position of his kingdom gave him command of the forests of Lebanon, and the high pitch of civilization, to which a long and successful commerce had advanced his people, had given birth to and nursed up cunning artificers of all the requisites of luxury and magnificence. Intent from the first upon his great work of building a house to God, he made a league with him, and covenanted for supplying his maritime territory with corn, on the terms of permission to cut down cedars on Lebanon, and of a supply of workmen.

This great work, such as never fell to human hands before, nor has since, had been contemplated by his father David. He had even made extensive preparations, and fixed the site on Mount Moriah, already sacred from Abraham's offering of his son, but now especially blest with God's presence, Who there answered him at the threshing-floor of Ornan, the Jebusite, when he sacrificed, and the plague was stayed. God, however, prevented his further proceeding, telling him that he should not build a house unto His name, because he had shed much blood upon the earth in His sight. But that He would give him a son, who should be a man of peace, and that he should build the house to His name. A short time before his death, David had accumulated abundance of materials, stones, and iron, and brass, and timber, for the work, and solemnly put them into the hands of Solomon, giving him a pattern also of the building, and even of the vessels and instruments of service. He had also for this purpose arranged the course of the priests and Levites. One of the last acts of his reign was the making over of all these to Solomon in a solemn assembly of all Israel, in which he bade him be strong and of good courage to build the house which the Lord had chosen him to build for His sanctuary: to fear not, nor be dismayed: for that the Lord God, even the God of David, would be with him, nor fail him, nor forsake him, until he had finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord. But David's provision, splendid as it was, came very far below the estimate of Solomon. No prince had loftier notions of magnificence than he. He was inspired with them as a gift for this sacred purpose. Lebanon was again to yield her tribute of cedars, and Hiram again to furnish artificers. For three years these additional preparations went on. Thirty thousand men, by courses of ten thousand for the month, were employed in felling timber in Lebanon, fourscore thousand were hewing stone in the mountains, and three-score and ten thousand were required for carrying burdens. Over all was a numerous staff of inspectors, amounting to 3,300. What a continual stir and din must have prevailed through the land, how frequent and how tumultuous must have been the bursts of feeling of saintly men, when they daily saw before them, along the lengthened road through the cities of Israel, from north to south, the unwearied procession of materials on their way to compose the house of the living God, where He was to dwell among them, and protect them with the glory of His presence. The imagination grows bewildered among the crowd of lively pictures which rises up before it on every side. It sees old and young running from their doors at the sound of the wheels to hold up their hands and bless the work, the old praying to see the day of accomplishment, the young listening to their accounts of God's merciful dealings and promises, now so vividly painted to their minds, as these portions of His holy residence rolled by. It sees the glad procession which escorted the laden wains through every town with song and dance, and timbrel

and harp. It enters into the overflowing of Solomon's heart, when he awoke each morning to the rolling of wheels, the creak and groaning of burdens and the cry of drivers, and poured out his spirit at his matins amid this strange accompaniment, this noisy anthem to God's glory. Oh! had he been but as zealous in preparing the materials of God's everlasting temple in his heart!

All things at length had been prepared, and, in the second month of the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began the building. In the eighth month of the eleventh year he finished it. As far as can be judged from description, the materials were more precious than the workmanship. But neither one nor the other were of any value as compared with its precious destination. Here God promised to dwell among the children of Israel, and not to forsake His people. Many and deep must have been his reflections upon the fate of the house which he was building. It depended not on the common and outward accidents of time and weather, but on the state of the inner man. It would fall when it ceased to have a model in the hearts of the king and people. An unfinished building ever excites solemn ideas, even in the most sanguine, by its ominous resemblance to a ruin. As therefore he laid stone by stone, and course upon course, and cemented them together, he must have had thrust before his eyes the day of God's vengeance, when in a few hours the Spoiler may undo his work of years. A wholesome awe must have continually rebuked his rising vanity, and chastened his joy. Short and frequent ejaculations must have burst from his lips, as he walked amid the throng of workmen, the mazy heap of materials, and inspected the rising pile, and many and fervent must have been the prayers of his secret chamber, as he opened and closed each day. He understood better than any one else the final object, the remote tendency of all this labour. He knew that these were sensible means towards a spiritual end: that God, in commanding this house to be built, was graciously complying with the gross notions of man, for that the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. He acknowledged that himself and his people were in a spiritual childhood, and as with children the rudest resemblance of their plaything will qualify to stand for its original, so was it with them. This very house, magnificent and glorious as it was, coarsely prefigured, with its stones and timber, some Heavenly original. Perhaps his glimpses scarcely reached to that temple of lively flesh, in which the glory of the Lord should dwell upon earth in the latter days. But he knew that according to the promise made to Abraham, the whole earth should be filled with his spiritual progeny, for whom no temple could serve, save that vast house in which Heaven is God's Throne and earth His footstool: that God would then no longer shut up His glory in a secret chamber, but reveal it to the whole world. Alas! the loss of this his temple would be the gain of the world. Never since the days of Noah, has builder had such a crowd of possessing thought pressed upon his mind; and never has been one more capable of giving it room and entertainment. A smile of ridicule instantly arises at the mention of the holiest Christian builder of the proudest Christian temple. Such a builder is an unnecessary trifler in comparison, his building an unmeaning show.

The furnishing of the house with its altars and holy vessels, next took up his attention. For this purpose he invited from Tyre a skilful workman in metal of the name of Hiram. The more sacred part of the furniture was cast in pure gold. The rest (and some were of enormous size) were cast in brass. All having at length been completed, the day was appointed for its solemn dedication.

The time was chosen with singular happiness. It was the seventh month, answering nearly to our September. It afforded for the purpose an interval of leisure to the people, the harvest being over, and the vintage not come. In the ecclesiastical calendar it was festive beyond all others. Being the Sabbatical month it opened with the spirit-stirring feast of trumpets, whose loud strains commemorated the creation of the world. On the tenth was the great day of national atonement: the nation, therefore, came clean and clad as it were in the white robes of righteousness and innocence for the ceremony. On the fifteenth was the feast of Tabernacles, when they commemorated by dwelling in booths and tents their long sojourn under tents before they found a resting-place in the land. It was on this festival, which lasted seven days, that Solomon most appropriately fixed for relieving the ark of God from its long wanderings under the tabernacle, and carrying it up into the temple as its final resting-place. When the day came, the king and all his people, which could not be counted for number, met and sacrificed before the ark, and then preceded it in solemn procession, as it moved on the shoulders of the Priests, accompanied by the whole train of Priests and Levites, sanctified for the cere-

mony. Thus it was carried from Mount Sion to Mount Moriah, and there lodged in the holy of holies of the temple, amid the sound of cymbals, and psalteries and harps, and of a hundred and twenty trumpets, while the voices of the singers, who stood at the east end of the altar, clad in white, rose amid the concert, and sang, "Praise the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." At this moment, and as the Priests coming forth from the holy of holies, testified that the Lord had taken up His resting-place, the cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the whole house, so that the Priests could not see to minister for its dazzling brightness. The king then rose and addressed and blessed the people, and taking his station on a brazen scaffold, so as to be seen by the whole congregation, and spreading forth his hands, he uttered a solemn prayer of dedication, in which he implored God's present assistance on every occasion of the use of this house. It is a noble and affecting prayer, which even at this day cannot be read without lively emotion. What must have been its effect amid assembled Israel, with the visible glory of the Lord, shining and bickering around them, and when at its conclusion fire came down from Heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices? The whole congregation bowed with their faces to the ground, and worshipped, saying, "Praise the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." A second splendid sacrifice, amid song and music, closed this ceremony; and on the twenty-third day, when the feast of tabernacles was over, the people returned to their homes. When all had been concluded, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a vision of the night, and answered his prayer of dedication by a promise of presence and protection, comforting him and his people with blessings, and warning them with threats.

Never did such an accumulation of solid glory come upon mortal man as upon Solomon, in this high privilege of builder of God's house. On this occasion he centered in himself that threefold character which never came together again, until for the last time it united and received its anti-typical accomplishment in the person of the Son of God. He was Priest, not in the mechanical part of sacrifice, which was confined by the law of Moses to the sons of Aaron, but as builder of house and altars to God, and by their dedication through the spiritual sacrifice of prayer. He was Prophet as favoured with especial communication from God on the fate of that house, and as the house which he built was prophetic of the temple of the human body in which God's glory should hereafter dwell, when the Redeemer stood upon the earth. On this occasion too he prefigured the holy and apostolic builders of the Christian Church, laying his foundation on the rock of Moriah, even as they on the rock of Christ. He stands out a prominent figure in the retrospect of God's Church, reflecting, as one of His types, the effulgence of glory which pours down through the long vista from the heavenly original. This his deed is one of the chief and critical points of its history, by which it is divided into stages, each more teeming with accomplishment towards the end than the last. He was now but in his twenty-fourth year, and had length of day and of glory before him, not, as other men, from reasonable expectation, but from the express promise of God, if only he would walk in His ways. The beginning of this course shows how happy and glorious might have been its end.

His prosperity grew to an amazing pitch. Not only was Jerusalem adorned with his palaces, but the land was decked with fair cities. Two of these were stationed for the sake of commerce, and were the gates through which riches flowed into the land, so that silver was as plentiful as stones in Jerusalem. One was in the north, Tadmor, in the wilderness which connected the Euphrates with the Mediterranean sea, and by upwards of a thousand years of prosperity bore testimony to Solomon's discernment in fixing its site. Alas! its splendid ruins at this day, preach to the traveller from Solomon's own text, "All is vanity." The other was in the south, Ezion-geber, on the Red Sea, which connected the Mediterranean with the Indian Sea. Thus Solomon made his country the cistern into which flowed full and constant streams of wealth, at once from northern, from central, and from Southern Asia. From the latter port his navies explored the distant regions of silver, and gold, and spices. It has been the only period (and brief indeed was this) in which the Holy Land has felt the advantages of its peculiarly happy situation, for uniting the commerce of the east and of the west. One military exploit only is recorded of this man of peace, the taking of Hameth-zobah. The rest of his reign, until towards its close, was entirely peaceful. It was, however, much indebted for this to his being in constant

preparation for war. One class of his forces clearly shows the extent of his dominion. Moses in his anticipatory rules for the king, prohibits him from "multiplying horses to himself." Yet Solomon maintained so many as 12,000. His empire, now extended into the flats of Assyria, seemed to require such a body. The splendour and renown of Solomon's kingdom, and his reputation for wisdom and magnificence attracted strangers from all quarters, and the queen of Sheba came from the remote and unexplored regions of the south to witness the truth of the extraordinary reports which had reached her. He was now in all that glory to which Israel ever after so fondly looked back, and never saw return, which he ambitiously looked forward to in his Messiah, and dazzled by its false glare, could not discern the spiritual glory in which He came. Had Solomon now died he had been happy: he had departed at peace with God, and left to posterity a name bright among the brightest. We have henceforward the sad tale to tell of his decline and fall.

It is singular that three cardinal statutes of those prescribed to the king by Moses, were violated by Solomon. He was not to multiply silver and gold to himself, nor to multiply horses to himself, nor to multiply wives to himself. The first two perhaps were not violated in spirit. God Himself promised him riches. The law of Moses seems to have had reference to the king scraping together and laying up money for the selfish purposes of arbitrary power. But Solomon's wealth, in the days of his glory, was his share as head of a wealthy nation, and not concentrated from scanty coffers. For his maintaining such a body of horse we have already seen what excuse may be made. But is it sufficient, even supposing that the service of this force was appointed beyond the limits of the tribes? Would it not have been more reasonable to throw himself, in strict obedience to this law, on the hands of God, with the assurance that what He had given, He would also help him to keep? Thus would have been avoided the stumbling-block of even an apparent breach of law. The breach of this commandment might have imperceptibly led to that of the next. One precept broken on ever so good grounds, if knowingly and wilfully broken, weakens the power of conscience, takes away from grace, and leaves the offender unarmed against the temptation of breaking another, which is still more peremptory, on slighter grounds, and with less compunction. The third precept had indeed been violated by David. But this only renders Solomon's offence less excusable. He had seen the severe penalty of its breach in the miserable divisions of his family. He himself had tasted its effects in having a struggle for the throne. A man of his admirable wisdom, and intimate knowledge of the human heart was bound to reject such an example, even had it not been unlawful by statute. Both love of God, and charity to man should have made it unlawful on principle. But instead of doing thus, he went far beyond David, not only in the numerousness of his harem; but also in following the hateful example of former outcasts from God's Church, of Ishmael and Esau, in taking to himself wives from among the idolatrous nations, from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. From this moment Solomon fell, and instead of a holy, wise, and just king, we have now before us an ungodly, infatuated, oppressive despot. This man, who with such fervent prayer had dedicated his house to the living God, could pronounce the abominable names and titles of false gods. He who had seen the visible glory of the Lord descend and consecrate his house, could endure to raise altars to the demons of darkness. He who had raised on Mount Moriah the temple of the Lord God of Hosts of Israel could erect on the rival and confronting height of Mount Olivet, temples to the most filthy of the filthy gods of the heathen. This man who publicly before the face of all Israel, and for himself and successors for ever, had made a covenant with God, to walk in His ways, and serve and obey Him, who knew, beyond all other men, the extent and effects of his ingratitude, and the frightful penalty of disobedience, he could thus recklessly, heartlessly, audaciously turn away from Him, and defy His displeasure. He forgot how he had been preferred to elder brothers, for the very purpose of maintaining the honour and glory of God. Yet God did not at once cast him away. He gave him a signal example of long-suffering and a proof of the truth of the burden of that holy song with which he had dedicated the temple, "His mercy endureth for ever." He appeared to him yet a third time, and although with a very different charge, with a threat instead of a blessing, yet the appearance was a sign of mercy. He had not given him up entirely to follow his own ways, He would still call him to repentance; and repentance, in this as in many other similar recorded cases, might have averted

the judgment which was passed against him. After rebuking him for his disobedience, God threatened to rend his kingdom from him and give it to his servant. But He lightened the burden of this punishment by delaying it until the days of his son, and reducing its severity to the separation of ten tribes, and not of the whole people. Yet the reason assigned for this alleviation was such as should have cut to the heart any one but the most selfish and insensible profligate. The sentence was thus mitigated for his father David's sake. So completely had Solomon cancelled with God all remembrance of former services. He says not for the sake of thy former merits, but of those of thy father. He had completely exhausted his own stock, and, as profligates so often are, was compelled to live upon his father. To such a miserable condition was reduced the chosen builder of the house of God. He was pronounced degenerate from his father, and apostate from himself.

His glory was now departing fast from him, and the splendid fabric of power which his father had reared, and himself had upheld with so much fame and honour, began to crumble into the dust. The Edomite whom his father had subdued began to be restless, and disturbed the quiet of the close of his reign, under Hadad one of the ancient royal seed of Edom. This commotion in the south was answered by one in the north, where Rezin wrested Damascus from his empire. Hence the neighbourhood of his two great commercial cities, Tadmor and Ezion-geber, became disturbed and insecure, and the channels of wealth into his kingdom were blocked up. His people grew impoverished and were no longer able to support his extravagance. His dominion became a yoke and a grievous yoke. They had not murmured as long as they contributed to a magnificence, honourable to the nation, from well-filled coffers. But now they were grievously and tyrannically taxed to support dalliance, debauchery, and idolatry, from curtailed resources. Discontents broke out, and the signal of the waning of the house of David was given by the Prophet Ahijah, who, in obedience to God's command, anointed Jeroboam as king over the ten tribes which were to revolt from his son.

The last recorded act of Solomon is his attempt to kill Jeroboam. Thus he ended with a wilful opposition to God's appointment. So little did he reck of God's last warning to him. So utterly had he sunk to the reprobate mind of voluptuousness.

Melancholy, indeed, is the review of the life of Solomon. We are grieved and miserably disappointed as in one of those days of spring, when we have awakened to a warm bright sun, with life and light in joyous sound and motion all around us; but by noon the sun is hidden in clouds of darkness, and rain and wind are howling. With intellectual vigour superior to that of his father David, he had passions equally strong, with less moral firmness to control them. He had not been bred up in the hardy school of adversity, nor had peril and the sword taught him either command over himself, or confidence in God. He sank therefore to the lowest depths of his father's sins, but never soared up to the height of his holiness. David's worst sins were momentary surprises compared with his. His were sins of wilful systematic indulgence; and, like a true voluptuary he forgot his best Friend, he forgot all His benefits, he forgot his plighted covenant. Here is a dreadful apostasy; here is a man once prodigally decked out in the most precious gifts of God's Holy Spirit, and then utterly stripped of them by his own act: one who had tasted (yea, and given to taste) the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, who fell away, and was not renewed again unto repentance.

Solomon

BY REV. EDWARD N. PACKARD, D.D.

"But Solomon loved many strange women." etc.—1 Kings xi. 1-13.

Some years ago two paintings were exhibited in this country, which attracted wide attention. One of them represented Rome in the height of her splendour, and the other in the depth of her decay. The contrast was melancholy and instructive. One could not repress the question as he turned from one scene to the other, What led to this mighty change? By what step did all this magnificence fade away? It was the

old story, which every great nation thus far in history has illustrated sooner or later, that of a secret, slow-moving moral decay, preceding and occasioning social upheaval and ruin.

Can it be that this monarch who is riding through the city streets, surrounded by his wives and his gorgeous retinue, this gray-haired man, prematurely old, his face heavy with sensual lines, his once resplendent eye glazed with wine—can it be that this is the man beloved of God, who besought Divine help when he came to the throne; who was chosen to build the house of God, who stretched out his hands and prayed to the unseen and pure and spiritual Jehovah at its dedication? How is the gold become dim! How is the most pure gold changed!

I. SOLOMON'S SIN.

This was no ordinary transgression of an ordinary evil-doer. It was not the general unworthiness of his life,—an unworthiness that pertains to every child of Adam. It was a distinct thing. It had an historical character—Solomon's sin. David had *his*—a sudden lapse from virtue, terrible in itself and in its consequences, but repented of with a broken heart. The sin of Jeroboam was historical. It is often spoken of by the Prophets and Chroniclers. But the sin of Solomon and his downfall stand out among the most melancholy ruins of man's history. It was the fall of one who held peculiar relations to God. He had no right, we may say, to turn away his heart from the King of Kings, Who had chosen and loved and helped him. Ingratitude mingled itself with his perversity. He knew, by distinct assertions made to him, that on his fidelity Israel's future hung.

It was the fall, too, of a great genius, of a vast sea-like mind. It was the diversion of great inherited wealth by its administrator, who squandered the very treasures of the King. In him the Divine Spirit had an ample organ in which to play. Surely, then, the fall of such a lofty and generously-endowed being is a catastrophe of colossal proportions.

It was not, primarily, sensuality. That was only the outworking of an inner and far deeper evil. The simple and honest historian tells us that he loved many strange women, thus breaking an explicit command to the chosen people. Now the ultimate evil against which Moses was led to legislate in this particular was not polygamy nor licentiousness, but the idolatry which the foreigner would inevitably introduce. There was also a direct command to kings not to multiply wives for the same reason,—the fear of idolatry,—and this Solomon broke. When he was old, we read, his wives turned away his heart. No, we may be sure that mere pleasure was not the prime cause of the downfall of the man beloved of God. It was something deeper.

Nor was it, let us say further, pure and simple idolatry. That also was a symptom of inner disorder and weakness. It was like polygamy, a form only of heart-wandering from God. The words of Scripture seem guarded on this matter. They leave it uncertain as to how far Solomon went when he followed his strange wives as an ignoble captive. They "turned away his heart after their gods." He "went after" Ashtoreth. He "did evil in the sight of the Lord." He built high places for his *wives*, which burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. There is not the slightest evidence that he ever abandoned the worship of Jehovah, or set up images of Him as Jeroboam did, or that he ever lost faith in Jehovah as the one and only true God. But *his heart was not perfect*; and this was the sin beneath his sensuality and idolatry. He began to waver by tolerating the false religions of his wives. Then he built them places of worship. Then he grew liberal, and thought there might be something after all worth saving in the religions prevailing around Israel which they followed. He would learn what he could from them, and broaden his provincial and restricted notions derived from his fathers. As he grew old and familiar with evil his moral fibre relaxed. The sharp distinctions he once drew between right and wrong began to fade out. Who, thought this king, sets himself up to say that there is only one narrow way of life?

It is of great importance for us to understand what this sin of Solomon's essentially was. Because we, like him, are tempted to commit it, and deny our God. Any one can see the unmitigated curse resting on mere sensualism. No one of us is tempted to idolatry, but the great sin of having a heart not perfect towards God is one we are all exposed to, even though we have not the genius, nor glory, nor opportunity of Solomon. His heart never was abandoned to gross evil. It was simply *turned away from the Lord*. He looked at other things than the law of righteousness. He meditated other things than the statutes of the Lord. His true path was to follow David, to lead Israel into a

pure worship of Jehovah, in a life separated from that around him, but from the promise of his youth he turned aside like a deceitful bow.

The religious world of to-day finds its most subtle and powerful temptation in the general revolt against restraint and constraint. It takes now one form and now another. It comes as a protest against what is called narrowness, even in construing the terms of the Gospel upon which men enter into life. The world has always seen the insolence of greatness against the law of God. It sees now the same insolence under cover of the grace of God. But whatever we may discover in science or art, whatever gains we may make in the domain of reason, there can be nothing essentially new in the way of life by Jesus Christ. We might as soon expect new bones in the human system. The data of theology are all furnished, and have been for ages. The path of life is just as narrow and just as broad as ever. God demands the whole heart, because anything less is nothing at all to Him. Half even of Solomon's great soul is worthless in the Kingdom of Heaven.

II. SOLOMON'S PUNISHMENT.

We observe at once that it was of a character to be peculiarly felt by one of his great endowments and brilliant opportunities. It came very slowly. Not the sudden ending of his life by the hand of an assassin. Not his rejection from the kingdom by an armed rebellion. He lived out his days, and was spared the pain of turning over his power to a servant. His sufferings were far more appropriate to the mould of his mind. In the first place, although we do not find it here recorded, he lived long enough to see that his splendid experiment in life had been a miserable failure. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, was his sad verdict. His "world" passed away and the lust of it. He ceased to desire. Where once there stood in his mind visions of pleasure and power and light, there came to be nothing but a heap of ashes. He looked on his palaces. They were there still,—gleaming marbles, dripping fountains, bewitching music, graceful forms—but their charm was gone. A wind had swept over them,—the blast of the trumpet of Sinai. He mused upon his wisdom, and it was great; but sorrow had kept even company with his advancing mind, and all he could say was: He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. He had faithfully tried "the world," and now he saw it passing away and it was not worth the saving. His soul was left desolate.

Punishment came in another form. He was unable to transmit the kingdom to his posterity; and such men have an eye to the future, in which their greatness will come to be fully seen and honoured. They are above the narrowest lines of an ignorant selfishness. They would make coming ages tributary to themselves. To Solomon, who had been made acquainted with the mind of God towards Israel, there must have been a profound sorrow in the certainty that his failure carried the nation down with himself. Those in authority hold a peculiar place in the Divine economy, because their defections entail such widespread disasters. Hence God rightly exacts extraordinary punishments of them. Solomon's punishment was in knowing with perfect certainty that all his great wealth and power and fame and opportunity—all this that God had given him—had been in vain. He had built upon the sand. He was on a vessel that was moving towards the rocks that would engulf him and all that sailed with him.

Yet we cannot but note the mingling of Divine mercy with these judgments, and the power of one generation over another. For David's sake, the rending of the kingdom should be delayed during the son's lifetime. For David's sake and the nation's sake, one tribe should remain faithful in the general breaking up that soon followed.

Was Solomon finally lost? We cannot tell. One thing we know: the path he chose leads to endless ruin, and only the grace of God can recall a wandering spirit back to Him. Strive to enter in at the straight gate, for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.

Rehoboam

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men," etc.—1 Kings xii. 6-11.

God is never at a loss for instruments for working out His purposes, and most often He makes use of ordinary instruments. He had said that, for the sin of Solomon in favouring idolatrous practices, He would take the kingdom from his son, leaving him

but the tribe of Judah. This purpose He wrought out by means of the pride and folly of Rehoboam himself. When this young king rejected the advice of the old men, and adopted the rash and violent line of conduct recommended by the young, the ten tribes at once revolted from him, and made Jeroboam their king. Thus did the Word of God come true, and thus did He make the wrath of man to praise Him in the accomplishment of His purpose.

Whether we think of Rehoboam as a king or as a man, his conduct was both foolish and wrong.

1. As a king, he could not have acted more foolishly than in setting his people against him at the very beginning of his reign. First impressions go for much, and it was the height of folly to act in such a way as that their first impressions of their new king's character should be that of harshness and tyranny.

It was most unwise also to disregard his father's ancient counsellors. They had had long experience in the management of public affairs, and were well acquainted with the temper of the people. Even putting aside the question of right, they knew what was wise and prudent. These young men, on the other hand, were without experience or judgment. They might be pleasant companions, but they were not likely to be good advisers. It looked well, certainly, that Rehoboam should *first* call for the advice of the elders; but from what followed it would appear that there was little sincerity in his doing so.

But this treatment of the elders was more than unwise; it was wrong in every way. It showed a disrespect to his father's memory, whose advisers they had so long been. It showed a want of reverence for age, and a lack of that respect which the opinion of the old and experienced ought always to command. It showed a vain, proud, self-confident spirit; for doubtless it was because the advice of the young men agreed with his own mind, that Rehoboam was so ready to adopt it. And it is not unlikely that the young men knew what counsel would best please the king, and gave him their advice in a spirit of flattery.

His behaviour as a king was wrong also in this respect. We see in him no sign whatever of any regard for the good of his people. All that he thought of was his own power. What would be for their welfare and happiness, what would tend either to their prosperity or to their moral improvement—of any care for this there is no sign whatever. To bring them completely under his power, and to rule them with a rod of iron, appears to have been all his aim.

Viewing him therefore as a king, we cannot but see in Rehoboam a vain and rash young man, self-confident and arbitrary, wanting in respect for those older and wiser than himself, and coming to the throne with no thought of his responsibility, and no desire for the good of his people, but seeking only his own selfish ends.

It is not always right to judge of conduct by its results. But in this case the result was just what might be expected from such conduct, and thus carries an important warning. The people were completely estranged from their new king, and the larger part fell away from his authority, never to return; he lost the chief part of his kingdom.

2. It is not without use, thus to consider the conduct of Rehoboam as a *king*. But it is more useful still to turn our attention to it in a more general way. Rehoboam was not a very young man at this time. Yet, as compared with his father's counsellors, he was young; and, considering him and his companions on the one side, and the old men on the other, we may fairly regard him as a young man despising the advice of his elders.

This is not an uncommon tendency in the young. Youth is naturally self-confident, and slow to profit by the experience of others. Hence, in a measure, the truth of the proverb, "One must buy one's own experience." A young man full of life and spirit, proud, impetuous, and self-willed, is apt to think lightly of the calm and sober advice of those of riper years. Ignorant of the dangers and difficulties with which they are well acquainted, and not thinking of failure and disappointment as possible, he is prone to pursue his own plans with all the eagerness of youth, and to attribute the wise cautions he receives to the timidity of age. Now, youthful eagerness is in itself valuable, and may be turned to good account. By no means let it be damped or discouraged. But, on the other hand, let the advice of elders be seriously attended to, and thus let the zeal and energy of youth be tempered by the calm prudence of age.

The advisers whom Rehoboam followed were the young men who had grown up with him, the companions of his youth. But it does not follow that a good companion should

be a good adviser. If a young man wishes to do right, let him ask the advice, not of a pleasant acquaintance, but of one whom he has reason to think a wise and God-fearing man; a dull companion, it may be, compared with the other, but a safer counsellor. When young men without settled principle get together, they often encourage one another in what many an one among them would perhaps, when quietly alone, see to be wrong.

We cannot but see that *pride* had much to do with the conduct of Rehoboam. He would not stoop to treat the people gently, as the old men advised. He would carry things with a high hand, he would not give way. In any matter whatever, to be governed by pride and temper is the sure way to go wrong. Then reason and judgment and right feeling are put aside, and nothing is listened to but the promptings of a blind and senseless passion. Often a voice within whispers to the man that he is wrong, but pride leads him still to pursue his course; he will not yield; no, not even to his better self. Of all guides that can be followed pride is one of the very worst.

As was said before, Rehoboam seems to have had no thought for the good of his people, but only for his own dignity and authority. In this he was entirely wrong. And we always must be wrong when, in any matter, we put aside the question of duty. There is a right and a wrong in everything; and our desire should be, not merely to do what is pleasing or advantageous to ourselves, but to do what is right. We are God's servants, entrusted by Him with talents, and responsible to Him for the use of them. We must never lose sight of this. In all things, our desire should be to know what we ought to do, what God would have us to do.

We cannot but notice another want in Rehoboam. He asked the advice of the old men and of the young men, but we read nothing of his asking the guidance of God. How different from his grandfather David, who sought God's guidance in everything! How different even from his father Solomon, who, when he came to the throne, sought, as the first blessings, an understanding heart, to judge the people, and to discern between good and bad! We see nothing of this in Rehoboam. What wonder that he failed? In every important step in life, nay, in all things, we should seek God's grace and guidance. He who does not pray has no security against going wrong. He may take the wisest advice, he may follow the most prudent course, but, if he neglect prayer, he is not truly wise after all. It is well to listen to sound advice, but it is better still to seek counsel of God; and to commit our way to Him.

One word more. The proud and self-confident conduct of Rehoboam was totally opposed to what the conduct of a Christian ought to be. If a man be not meek and humble, he is without one of the chief marks of a Christian. Humility is the very spirit of the Gospel.

Rehoboam

BY REV. S. A. BROWNING.

"He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."—2 Chronicles xii. 14.

Rehoboam is not an uncommon character. He represents a large class. There were moments when he was impelled in a right direction; but his resolution failed, his good intentions faded away, and his evil passions regained the ascendancy. At the commencement of his reign he regarded "the law of Jehovah," when prosperous and powerful he forsook it. "And it came to pass when Rehoboam," &c. (ver. 1) Chastised for his sin he appeared to become humble and penitent:—"Then came Shemaiah, the Prophet," &c. (vers. 5, 6.) Yet after all, his life was a failure—a moral abortion. His epitaph written with the finger of God is, "and he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."

I. IMPLIED OBLIGATION. It is implied that it was a duty for Rehoboam to seek the Lord. This is a common obligation. It needs no proof beyond an appeal to man's consciousness.

1. The loss sustained. It is the loss of an object which renders the seeking of it necessary. But how is God lost to man? He has lost the true knowledge of His character; the conscious enjoyment of His favour; the blessedness of communion with Him. He has no true fellowship—no abiding moral sympathy with God. He is

"without God in the world." How complete is man's loss of God! How deplorable its consequences!

2. Its retrievableness. This great loss may be retrieved. For this purpose—(1) God has revealed Himself to man in his own nature. "God was manifest in the flesh." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." (2) The redemptive work of Christ is made known. "To wit that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," &c. (3) The Holy Spirit performs His beneficent functions. "Howbeit when He the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth," &c. "God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

3. The importance of its recovery. Whatever else man may attain, that which is essential to a true and happy life—to his present and eternal well-being—will be wanting if God is not sought and found. "In His favour is life." Man without God is in this world a wreck—a prey for the wild winds and surging billows of trial and temptation—in the everlasting future his being will be a curse—a dark and dreary and ceaseless desolation. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," &c.

II. MENTAL CONVICTION. In Rehobam we see mental conviction arising from knowledge of duty, promptings of conscience, consciousness of guilt. This is a mental state of frequent occurrence. It may be observed:—

1. As the effect of the truth. Whenever the conscience of man is appealed to by the voice of truth it responds truly. Divine truth commends itself to every man's conscience. Thus when the Prophet came to Rehobam and said, "Thus saith the Lord, ye have forsaken Me," &c., he felt the force of the accusation, his conscience was aroused, its thunders shook his guilty soul. "The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword"; it is "a discoverer of the thoughts and intents of the heart." "As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled." There are many Felixes.

2. As intensified by circumstances. While the truth is the instrument by which man's moral nature is stirred, circumstances often give force to its operation. In seasons of trial, in hours of suffering, in periods of calamity, conscience is more wakeful; it has then a quicker ear, a keener sensibility:—the truth tells then with tenfold power. Rehobam saw the clouds gathering;—the hosts of Shishak were encamping before the city, and thus gave pugnacy to the denunciation of the Prophet. Many dismiss truth and conscience with "go thy way for this time," when there is a clear sky above them, who tremble and are "in great fear" when the dark tempest lowers.

3. As critical in its results. How much depends on moments of conviction! They are frequently critical. Little as many regard them they are often the turning point of destiny. It does not seem that Rehobam ever paused in his downward career from this time forward. Convictions are shaken off, the heart is hardened, conscience is seared, and the trifer perishes. Oh had he been wise! Had he paused and repented! But he hesitated only for a moment, went on and was destroyed! "Because I have called," &c.

III. MORAL INFIRMITY. There was a want of decision in Rehobam. His convictions led him to do many things, but there was one thing he did not do; he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. This was his ruin as it is that of many. Whence it this? It may be traced:—

1. To sensual habits. Nothing is more adverse to religious decision than sensuality. This was one source of moral weakness in Rehobam. He was a sensualist. (2 Chron. xi. 18;—23; 1 Kings xiv. 21—24.) He indulged in "fleshy lusts which war against the soul." These are the worst foes of man's spiritual well-being. Stumbling-blocks, over which many, in spite of their convictions stagger into hell.

2. To evil companionship. The associates a man chooses have a powerful influence on his character. They may promote or hinder salvation. It is recorded of Rehobam "He forsook the counsel the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him." He preferred for his companions the young, the gay, the frivolous;—"lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." What wonder that "he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord!" "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity to God?"

3. To Satanic temptation. In the vacillation of this man we mark the influence of the evil one. The Tempter had to do with his decision. He is ever on the alert to

extinguish the spark which has been kindled in the soul, to drown the voice of conscience, to administer opiates to those who show signs of awakening. He is ever active to prevent man from preparing his heart to "seek the Lord";—to keep him halting between two opinions, till the die is cast, and it is too late to repent. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."

IV. ACCUMULATED GUILT. "He did evil because," &c. This sin was parent of a host—a legion of sin. Observe, he sinned in this neglect of known duty, and in what resulted from it. So do all who pursue a like course. They sin:—

1. In resisting their convictions. In this very act there is deeply aggravated guilt. It is trampling on known duty. Extinguishing Divine light in the soul, resisting and quenching the Spirit. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world," &c. "If ye were blind ye should have no sin; but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth." "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."

2. In self-depravation. Trifling with convictions depraves the heart. It is a preparation for further, bolder transgressions;—it is a hardening process. Rehoboam's instability was not only evil, but the cause of evil—not only sin, but the cause of many sins. "Those are easily drawn by Satan to any evil who are wavering and inconstant in that which is good, and are never persuaded to make religion their business." "Beware lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "To-day, if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts."

3. The depravation of others. Rehoboam "did evil," in that through his guilty conduct the people were corrupted. "And Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord," &c. (1 Kings, xiv. 22—24). "One sinner destroyeth much good." Decision for God is an effective means of influencing others, and of promoting their salvation; but he who neglects the dictates of truth and conscience, and sins against the light, does all that man can do to encourage sin, and ruin souls.

Beware of indecision; it is a soul-enslaving, soul-destroying evil. "Prepare thine heart to seek the Lord." Seek Him with full purpose of heart.

Jeroboam

BY REV. G. W. SMITH, M.A.

"He shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam," etc.—1 Kings xiv. 16

Jeroboam was the son of Nebat, but about his parentage and infancy we know nothing more than is conveyed by that expression. He learned the business of a builder. In that capacity he entered the royal service. When Solomon was erecting Millo and repairing Jerusalem, Jeroboam was foreman or manager over the masons. He contrived to get a great deal of work out of the men under his care. His management attracted the favourable attention of his master. The king at that time was in need of men with energy and skill to keep up his revenue. Extravagance in the Court was wasting the resources of the royal treasury. He therefore appointed Jeroboam as tax collector in the district of Ephraim. The foreman builder thereupon joined the staff of the civil service. In this new position he succeeded so well that he excited the fears of the king lest he should aim at the throne. Solomon had reached that stage of decline as a ruler that he adopted the method of the unscrupulous tyrant to rid himself of his enemy. His plan was to murder the tax collector. But he escaped before the royal project could be executed, and made his home in Egypt for a time. In Egypt, as in Israel, he was successful. He won in that land, though a stranger and an exile, the hand of the queen's sister; and he so established himself in the affection and interest of his new acquaintances, that they were unwilling for him to leave their land. Meanwhile, however, Solomon had died, and Jeroboam knew from Divine intimation that there was business for him in his native land. At that time the kingdom was very much upset. The nation was groaning under the imposition of the burdens which growing luxury had put upon taxation. Now, when the son of Solomon came to the throne, the representatives of the people thought this excessive expenditure should be brought within reasonable limits. They approached the young king,

Rehoboam, with a petition that by restricting the expenses of the Court he would relieve them of this financial oppression. The old advisers of the throne told their young ruler that it would be wise to accede to so temperate a request. It could involve no hardship upon him, as his obligations were not so extensive as those of his father, and by establishing this reform he would bind his subjects in affectionate loyalty to himself. He turned a deaf ear to this sage counsel, and was guided by the irresponsible and foolish plans of the young, untried companions. His answer to his people was that he would make their yoke heavier rather than lighter. "My father chastised you with whips; I will chastise you with scorpions." A section of the nation revolted. Jeroboam became the champion of the new cause. Rehoboam received the deserts of his mad folly in a speedy defeat. He fled to Jerusalem, to reign over a dismembered country. The kingdom of David and of Solomon was henceforth divided into Israel and Judah, and was never united again. Rehoboam reigns in Jerusalem. Jeroboam set up his throne as king of the land variously spoken of in Scripture as Israel, Samaria, and Ephraim.

Jeroboam had a magnificent opportunity. He entered upon his office at a critical period in the history of God's people. The glamour of success was upon his enterprise. He had stood for a people who had suffered under an injustice, and won in their name. He might have led them into purity of faith, if not to political peace. How miserably he failed in this is shown by our text. Here is a great man with a great opportunity. Instead of a great success, he left on record that his life was a great failure.

We may profitably look at the privileges enjoyed by Jeroboam. They consist chiefly in two important things—a special revelation and a popular cause.

What is this special revelation? When he had just laid aside the tools and garb of a builder at Jerusalem, and was on his way to the north to enter upon his new post as the tax collector, he encountered a Prophet. Prophets did not receive much favour from the Court in Solomon's day. There were practices inside the royal home with which Prophets did not agree. This Prophet who met Jeroboam, Ahijah, is wearing a new coat. His appearance in so respectable attire attracts the attention of this traveller, although he has so much other food for thought. Ahijah takes his new coat off and rips it up in twelve pieces. Ten of these pieces he gives to Jeroboam. "There," says he, "God will give you ten parts of this kingdom, and you shall rule over them." Can you not understand what effect this announcement would have on the mind of the young civil officer? He had taken one step upward already. A more important advance seems before him. How is he to meet this revelation?

There is something very remarkable in the method followed by the Prophet to get the attention of Jeroboam. It is a most extraordinary way of discharging the functions of a Prophet. But he was aware of two things—that he had a difficult audience and a delicate subject. It is very hard to get the ear of men who are self-complacent in their success. Their attention is engrossed with their worldly prosperity, and they have neither eye nor ear for Divine things. Souls laden with sorrow are thereby inclined to hear the voice of God. They seek comfort, and expect to find it in that way. It is the same with the poor, the bereaved, the broken-down, the unsuccessful. Thank God, there is a Gospel for them, and their desire is not mocked. The man who is getting on, whose ambition is being gratified, who needs no help from man, and thinks he needs none from anywhere, the man who is busy, in a hurry, whose days are long and whose nights are short, that man will not readily listen. He has letters to write, telegrams to answer, requests to consider, and cannot attend to a Prophet or a preacher. Listen! God has a message for you. The preacher has been sent to deliver it to you. God is to make you king over the greater part of Israel. The preacher has never a small promise to make. He has always great things in stock. He calls men everywhere into greater and better life.

What an inspiration should come to a man with the reflection that he is Divinely called. In what spirit should this call be met? He should stand beside Moses and Isaiah, Jeremiah and Paul. Jeroboam did not stand there, but beside all the proud soldiers of history, and, like theirs, his opportunity was lost. If he had felt what honour was his, and what grace was needed to sustain it unsullied, he would have hidden his face in reverence before God, and shrunk with hesitation from his task. As it was, we know how he even sought to anticipate the course of Providence, and, with a sinful heart, waited the time of his advancement. God wants the men who are getting

on, men of growing prosperity and increasing ability. He wants them, too, for royal life and royal duty. But you need to implore His guidance and to receive in all humility His grace if you are to serve Him in holiness and truth.

We have already seen that Jeroboam was the hero of a popular cause. If he did right, his example would be largely followed by others. If he did wrong, every part of the nation would be affected with the poison of his evil behaviour. In this respect Jeroboam enjoyed a unique privilege of position. There is no doubt at all as to his fitness for so conspicuous a post, as far as ability was concerned. His failure was not mental, but moral.

Men do not surrender their wills to another in theory, but in practice they submit themselves to leadership. One man will lead a whole company of men. If he goes to a place of worship he can take them with him. If he prefers the public-house his inclination determines their conduct. This is a rule that prevails in every social circle. One man is the accepted pattern for a whole workshop. A father is the standard of character for all his family. One woman may set the moral fashion to all her neighbours. It is a high privilege, affording a great opportunity. God gave Jeroboam this privilege. How poorly he used it we know from our text.

God gives to every man such a privilege, to some a greater privilege than to others. What are you doing with it? You should lead men to penitence for sin, to a desire for righteousness. There is no greater service anyone can render. He who converts a sinner from the error of his way covereth a multitude of sins. If we be not faithful to this peculiar trust the blood of those who look to us for example will be required at our hands. We may sin as Jeroboam sinned, and make others to sin as he did, but the penalty of such misconduct is more serious than personal—the association of moral failure with our name—its issues blight life on earth and shut the doors of Heaven to those who otherwise might enter its bliss.

Let us now consider what those sins were which gave Jeroboam so unsavoury a name in the history of his people. In what way did he sin? Was he licentious, a man of wicked speech or wanton deeds? The grossest sin is not always most loathsome to the mass of men. God's eye often sees beneath a coat which is worn in decent society a heart blacker than any which beats beneath the rags of the drunkard or the gaudy finery of the harlot. The most notable of this king's sins was the institution of an idolatrous worship in Samaria. Hitherto there had been no breach between the two parties in the nation as regards worship. There were Rehoboamites and Jeroboamites, but the distinction, although sharp enough, was only political. Political rivals may be found side by side before the Throne of God. True worship is the unifier of men. The Throne of Grace makes many minds one in heart. The Temple was the common meeting-place for all, whether they belonged to the north or the south. Everyone shared in its magnificence and its peculiar blessing. Jeroboam instituted the new form of worship as a political measure. He reasoned thus:—"When the people go up to Jerusalem to worship they will turn again to Rehoboam, and will come back to kill me; I shall provide them a new religion which will keep them at home and thus avert my political danger." He did so, and set up altars in Dan and Bethel to keep his people at home. He could not trust the people. He was afraid lest their fidelity should fail. He made this great schism in the nation, which perpetuated bitterness between the two kingdoms and led to the final destruction of his own land. Of course this new and rival worship had much of the appearance of the real thing, but the spirit and motives of which it was the outcome were thoroughly selfish, and its temper was in essence opposed to truth and God. Jeroboam is the first royal defender of the faith, the first of that long line of kings who have usurped the title Head of the Church. He is the prototype of the race of men who make political and selfish aims subordinate to the glory of God, who lay unholy hands upon the sublimities of Heaven to prop up an earthly system which, however august, is only temporal. The fate of every one of them has been the same as that which overtook the worship instituted by Jeroboam, and all such systems must go the same way. The schism of history is that which puts men in the place of God, the interests of a party or a State before the welfare of immortal souls. This sin of Jeroboam is committed by every man who put himself first, his own desires before the will of God, his own interests before the will of God, his own interests before His commands, pleasure before duty, passion before worship. Are you like Jeroboam? It is the peculiar temptation of strong, successful men, but its penalty is the same in every case.

Another sin which Jeroboam committed was likely enough to follow upon his previous transgressions, he appointed base men as priests. He practically said, "Any one is good enough for a minister." His attitude towards Divine ministry was the same as is too prevalent in our own day. It is a profession necessary because there are religious observances, respectable because it must be supported, and therefore a means of livelihood. Any man who thinks little enough of Divine worship to make it a prop for his business or social stability is not likely to have correct notions about the ministry. But he has only to read the history of Ephraim to see the logical outcome of Jeroboam's ideas. The pulpit is not the place for rubbish. The altar is not the place for fools. They will do less harm in the army or the navy, and in those stations may be of some use. They are a danger in the public service of God. Every Church needs a ministry which has seen God face to face, men who have been cleansed from moral filth in a baptism of blood, men equipped in mind with all possible knowledge, with clear thought, and lofty purpose, strong intellect, and unswerving moral character. No religion can be kept alive by parasites. No faith can endure on recognised imbecility even under royal sanction. The Lord Jesus Christ selected men to honour Him and His work who so spoke to their kind that the Christian centuries have listened and learned at their feet. This sin of Jeroboam is that he gave the least to the service of God. We shall likewise sin if we hold back the best.

Jeroboam received warnings from God before he finally gave himself up to his life of sin. God had called him, and did not leave him to rush headlong to destruction. Twice was Jeroboam warned in a signal manner. On one occasion he was warned when he was presiding over a religious festival at Bethel, standing by the altar of the false god. A man of Jehovah came to remonstrate with the king and denounce this idolatry in which he was engaged. Jeroboam was in no mood to listen; he lifted his royal hand to order the arrest of the Prophet whose correction he resented. The hand which gave the command itself became rebel to the imperial will. It lost its art and power. The Prophet who was to be destroyed becomes the medium of healing and restoration to the paralysed limb. Still the king seems to have taken little heed. The accidents of life are the messengers of God which preach to proud and sinful men that they should repent. Why do their words of warning fall so often on deaf ears?

Again the Lord spoke to Jeroboam, and tried to reach him on that side of his nature most of all susceptible to influence—through the death of his child. Yet the king persists, and goes heedless to his ruin. God warns men. If you go into an eternity in which there is no hope, it is over the heaped-up mercies of Heaven, over the numerous obstacles put in your path for your warning, trampling under your feet the very love of God.

Asa

BY REV. ELIJAH HORR, D.D.

"Help us, O Lord our God; for we rely on Thee."—2 Chronicles xiv. 11.

The history of Israel after the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom is one of shame and degradation. The kingdom which had attained such strength, power and glory under David and Solomon, was rent in twain by internal dissensions after the death of the latter; and the two kingdoms rivalled each other in the depth of their wickedness and in their extreme departure from God than in most other particulars. Seldom has there been in history such a rapid decadence of national spirit and religious life. While this was more apparent in the kingdom of Israel than in that of Judah, yet it was manifest in both. Upon the death of Abijah, Asa succeeded to the kingdom. He was very young at his accession and for some time the affairs of the government were administered by his mother, or, according to some, his grandmother Maachah, who is understood to have been a granddaughter of Absalom. Sometimes it occurs that characters appear in families and epochs that cannot be accounted for upon any of the ordinary principles of evolution. They seem to be an exception to the laws of heredity as we generally recognise them or we fail to discover their marked characteristics in their near ancestors. There seems to have been nothing in precedent conditions or direct inheritance that prophesied the good reign of Asa.

The young king seems to have possessed from his early years those rare combinations

of excellences that we call character, however he obtained them. On assuming the reins of government, he was conspicuous for his earnestness in supporting the worship of God and rooting out idolatry with its attendant immoralities, and for the vigour and wisdom with which he provided for the prosperity of his kingdom. In his zeal against heathenism he did not spare his grandmother Maachah, who occupied the special dignity of "king's mother," to which great importance was attached in the Jewish court, as afterwards in Persia. She had set up some impure worship in a grove, but Asa burnt the symbol of her religion and threw its ashes in the brook Kidron, as Moses had done to the golden calf, and then deposed Maachah from her dignity. Such radical and decisive action upon the part of a young man, in the beginning of his reign, indicates unusual courage and strong principles of action. He evidently had that quality of character, so much vaunted in these modern days, that we call *strenuousness*. What he believed to be right, he did, apparently without regard to consequences or family affiliations.

Asa exhibited early the characteristics of real statesmanship. He recognized that right religious conditions are the true basis of a nation's prosperity; and he was especially zealous to restore to Judah that consciousness of the high destiny to which God had called her, and the belief that the Divine power was truly at work within her.

The first ten years of his reign were occupied with the reformation of worship and the strengthening of defenced cities. The tribe of Judah seems always to have had and exhibited the better traits of the Jewish people; associated with Benjamin she now made up the small kingdom that was Asa's inheritance, and over which he had such a long and brilliant reign. His early and earnest efforts towards religious reformation, his strenuous purpose, at any cost, to root out all idolatrous practices; his firm and restful faith in God, together with his statesmanlike husbanding and strengthening of the resources of his kingdom, seem to have restored the old morale to his people and given them again that *esprit de corps* for which these tribes were especially noted in the glorious days of David and Solomon.

There is no doubt that Asa's personal example and wise measures tended much to consolidate the strength of his little kingdom, and to raise it to that equality with the rival kingdom, which might not in the first instance have appeared feasible when the great disproportion of territory is considered. He was thus unconsciously preparing himself and his people for that great crisis in their history, the invasion from Egypt under Zerah and his almost numberless host. We do not read of so large an army elsewhere in Scriptural history as this one, that, with flaunting banners, came sweeping through the mountain defiles to the seemingly certain overthrow and destruction of this little kingdom. Asa had done all that man could do, with the resources at his command, to repel this expected invasion, and now, with his comparatively little host he marches to meet his almost countless enemy with a courage and fortitude that seem almost preposterous and foolhardy if we leave out of account that alliance upon which he chiefly depended,—the presence and power of Jehovah, Who had so often in the past history of their nation miraculously interposed to deliver them from their foes. Before going into this unequal battle, King Asa offered a brief prayer to God, which, in its way, is as wonderful as can be found in this kind of literature in any age.

Perhaps nothing gives us a truer, all-round estimate of a man than his prayers. They reveal him as he is, stripped for the moment of all artificial disguises. In his prayers he stands revealed, both as to character and range of thought; and this seems no less true when the prayer is feigned and insincere. The Pharisee revealed himself as absolutely in his hypocritical prayer as did the publican in the single petition that expressed the yearning of his soul. This prayer of Asa's indicates, not only that he was a deeply religious man who had learned the great secret of "the rest of faith," but also that he had great breadth of comprehension. The true philosophy of prayer underlies these brief but pregnant petitions. It was not a mere outburst of emotion in the presence of impending fear and trouble, but a calm reliance upon a source of Divine strength that had been tested, and upon promises that had never been discounted or broken.

This wonderful prayer, for such indeed it may be properly called, is in every way worthy of careful study, and it will bear the closest analysis. It supremely magnifies God's power and exemplifies His willingness to use His power for those who, doing their utmost, still wholly rest on Him. The result of the prayer, the marvellous

victory achieved against such overwhelming odds, pledges God's help and a successful issue in every earnest conflict with spiritual foes, where the faith is implicit and is based upon His unchanging promises. There is a sublime, unwavering confidence in Asa's expression, "We rely on Thee." This supreme trust belongs to the life of faith. It is the result of experience. It cannot be simulated. It belongs to the higher ranges of the spiritual life, where the soul walks with God in a divine friendship, like Abraham of old. To such He reveals Himself. They rest in Him without a shadow of doubt, without a suspicion of fear, reposing in "the green pastures and beside the still waters" of perfect assurance and unalloyed and unabating trust.

Jehoshaphat

BY REV. WILLIAM R. CAMPBELL.

"Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead," etc.—2 Chronicles xvii. 1-10....

A review of the religious history of the reign, and realm of Jehoshaphat for a quarter of a century shows a sunken garden enriching and supporting the throne and the state

I. A SPIRITUAL GRAFT ON A STURDY STOCK.

"And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto the Baalim; but sought to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments, and not after the doings of Israel." The young king had taken the boyhood of his ancestor, David, as his model, as well as chosen the better traits of Asa for his type. He grafted low down on the stock his new shoot, where the sap was pure, and the moral purpose more striking. It is spiritual insight alone which leads one to select his heredity. Multitudes of persons when they criticise the Church cling to the *last* ways of saints and sinners. What a fine sporting event that was for a prince to jump three generations of ancestors and land alongside of the shepherd boy of Israel! You can almost see David welcoming the youth in his enthusiasm for God, for his fresh and pure impulses. Perhaps departed sires who were saints still serve as the guardian angels of children's children. One would like to think that in the degenerate descendants of our noble settlers the enfeebled offspring might hark back to worthier parentage than those who bore them. In crowded city streets and courts one is glad to think the Lord allows the budding life to strike into some sturdy trunk backward. With such a heroic stature as David's to look to it would require grace not to be blind to even the glaring faults of later years, but it was to the first and worthier ways of even this great sire that the rich heir of Judah looked for light and leading.

The spiritual features of this character are indicated further by the word: "And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord." Sometimes children see the evils of their parents' courses and avoid them without putting their lives in the care of their Heavenly Father. They often look to worldly leaders of reform and wise precepts of conduct, but there is an emptiness about life which only the comfort of the society of the Divine Friend can satisfy. A heart lifted up in the ways of God runs on an elevated track above many of the obstacles which harass the merely prudential man. The heart lifted up into God's ways means a life that moves along paths which God makes for Himself, where crowds do not count or disturb. One gets a bird's-eye view of life which is not impeded by roofs, blocks and streets. Faith elevates the soul to God's outlook, to the seeing place above, an Eiffel observatory with a better moral foundation.

As one can select his surroundings for his soul, his feeding grounds, and graft back into nobler life than his present condition would indicate, as he may discriminate through grace the worthy ways of men of mixed lives, so he may root back into Christ as his greater ancestry, and grow under the untainted branches of that mountain stock which towers above the heavens as the beneficent tree of life.

II. AN INHERITANCE INTRENCHED.

"Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand." Many a father who has toiled, and risked, and dared for a fortune has, as chief anxiety, that he cannot secure it to his children's permanent use. There are seldom two successive generations

of pioneers required in the same direction. If one will preserve what the preceding hands down, the highest ends will be gained. The trouble is, that, while people are gathering their patrimony their children are becoming limp in character. The watchman must be trusty as well as the vaults of the bank strong. It was trust in God which steadied the new ruler and made his possessions safe. "The Lord established the kingdom in his hand." The wisdom to hold property safely has to come from above. A man cannot keep a modern fortune in his cellar; he must distribute it. How shall he determine where to place it? One may be blinded so that he will confide in the deceitful and dishonest. As so much of wealth is represented by paper securities and is spread over distant areas, there must be a genius for sound confidences. Else vast interests are swallowed up. A father who has not carefully cultivated the consciences of his children may have an overweening trust in them, but he is scarcely in his grave before they are in the hands of creditors for their lavish wastefulness. We read that Jehoshaphat "set garrisons . . . in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken." But it was not only the military but the moral bequest which was established. To secure the intrenchment of an inheritance which the fathers have handed down is as important as the military procedure of putting fortresses in an enemy's country.

There is also a permanent character and career which men worthily seek to see exemplified in their children. In the competition of civilization there needs to be a pathfinder for every youth, some modern Eliezer to find the best helpmates. Soundness of head and heart, which delivers the young from fads and follies, from squandering their capital of sense, is a divine gift. Men in their business and professional life go through the world beating the air, and dissipating fine opportunities, because of a lack of steadiness of purpose, of conviction. They had good blood and bringing-up but they lacked ballast. In religious work even, and philanthropy, these are people who are always scouting in the enemy's country, but they never intrench their work in church or humanitarian service. Their birds are always moulting and never sitting on eggs, or bringing chicks to maturity. Supporting columns do not come along fast enough, and the enthusiastic worker is often beaten back by discouragement and stone barriers. He has hastened on without his siege guns and artillery.

In securing wealth to wise uses, in maintaining costly-bred character, in keeping clear of vanities, and securing the rewards of service, the Lord must establish the work of our hands. No law of entail will avail without this.

The king fought the same foes his father had done. "He took away the high places and the Asherim out of Judah." He was as fierce about keeping the internal enemies out of his realm as in standing off foreign foes. He was not more accommodating to those ever-threatening vices of heathendom than his sire. Wealth and peace did not make him lenient of license. Liberty meant the same to father and son. A fatal passion for toleration did not weaken the nerve of the heir of the realm against its enemies. We are told in the account of 1 Kings xxii. 46, how he rooted up the remnant of the Sodomites which had remained after his father's attempt at extirpation. Let the generations work the same stroke against modern evils and they would not find seed to sow themselves. Children lose their inheritance because they coquette with the sordid crew their fathers shut out. It is a spiritual insight and a heavenly sense which teaches children in modern society to strike sin in the same place their parents did.

III. A RESERVOIR OF REFORM FROM A REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

"Also in the third year of his reign he sent his princes . . . to teach in the cities of Judah." "And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; and they went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught among the people." It is a brave thing, perhaps, to strike the devil with anything that comes handy, but by and by the sticks and stones give out. There is need of an armoury. The king sent out his best trained men as circuit riders to instruct the people in divine truth. The most cultured minds were to meet the inhabitants of every city and explain God's law. It was a wise measure to have the princes mingle with the peasants; to have personal proofs of the interest of men of standing in the welfare of their fellows, and especially in the word of the Lord. Here was being prepared a storage basin of righteousness and reform. Instead of the rich young men rioting around Jerusalem, the ruler distributed his set, men of his own age, his companions, to instruct his humble and distant subjects.

It was doubtless a means of grace to the young lords, and it was good for the realm.

Princes of the blood do not always have the word of God with them in the outfit as they go around on their tours. They probably received the freedom of cities and were shown courtesies, as modern princes are, but they had "the book of the law of the Lord with them." "And with them the Levites . . . and with them . . . the priests." The ministers and rulers served the instruction of the people in the law of the Lord. Revivals of religion are closely associated with revivals of learning. It was so at the time of the Reformation. The truth and the Spirit go together. The Bible, or Christian hymns, are put in some new dress whenever there are heart stirrings among the people.

Reforms are often shallow and transient, because they have no deep reservoirs of divine truth to flow down and refresh the wayward multitude. Israel must have her forges. She cannot always go to the Philistines to sharpen her weapons.

Later on, when the Syrian hordes threatened his kingdom, the people joined the king in his prayer for deliverance. "Fear not ye," said the rulers, "neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's." Singers placed in the front ranks to give thanks to God for His mercy before an attack was made, and instead of charging the enemy fell to killing one another. This prayer and praise and truth-teaching were a barrier reef around the realm. "And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat." The word of God in the hearts of the people became a fountain of loyalty and protection.

Jehoshaphat has left some sentiments which show the lofty trend of his character and counsel, and are worthy to be preserved for other leaders of liberty. "Deal courageously, and the Lord be with the good" (2 Chron. xix. 11). "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee" (2 Chron. xx. 12). "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His Prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chron. xx. 20). "And said to the judges, Consider what ye do: for ye judge not for a man, but for the Lord; and He is with you in the judgment" (2 Chron. xix. 6).

Jehoshaphat

BY REV. ROBERT HARLEY.

"His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord."—2 Chronicles xvii. 6.

Jehoshaphat was a prince distinguished for his piety and excellence of his life. His reign which lasted for five-and-twenty years, was powerful and prosperous. He destroyed the altars and high places of idolatry; he caused a knowledge of the law to be diffused throughout the kingdom; and he filled the offices of judicial and ecclesiastical authority with the wisest and best men of the land. "And the Lord was with him." "All Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord."

I. SOME MEN, WHEN LIKE JEHOSHAPHAT THEY HAVE RICHES AND HONOUR IN ABUNDANCE, HAVE THEIR HEARTS LIFTED UP, BUT NOT IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD.

The natural tendency of such circumstances is to create and foster a spirit of pride, of self-sufficiency, and of independence. How many there are who, in the striking language of Scripture, "sacrifice unto their net and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat and their meat plenteous." How many there are who need to be warned as were the Jews of old! "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes. Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up and thou forget the Lord thy God. And thou say in thy heart, my power and the might of mine hand have gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." The possession of abundance has a tendency to close the eye against the hand which, ever open, supplies

that abundance; the possession of health leads to forget that it is the gift of God; the possession of worldly riches, or honour, or fame, or power, we are too prone to attribute to ourselves, and in our enjoyment of it we forget God. We have a striking exemplification of human nature, in this aspect of it, presented to us in Nebuchadnezzar, the monarch of Babylon. Ascending his lofty palace, and looking around him from its summit, he said, in the pride of his heart, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" It has been suggested, that if he had been engaged with his enemy, he would have called upon his false gods; or, finding their insufficiency, he might have been led to acknowledge the God of Heaven, as the monarch of Babylon not unfrequently did; but now, when surrounded by peace and prosperity, by all the splendour of the city which he had raised and ornamented, he saw not God from Whom all his power and prosperity came, and upon Whose bounty and care he was as much a pensioner as the meanest of his subjects; but he saw himself as the origin and director of all, and he said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" His heart was lifted up, not like Jehoshaphat's in the ways of the Lord, but in the ways of pride, of self-sufficiency, and independence of God. And, that he might learn the lesson of humility and dependence, Nebuchadnezzar was driven among the beasts of the field. So if we look at human nature, not in its highest but in its lowest grades; if we trace it down from the monarch of Babylon to the lowliest who are engaged in the every-day occupations of life; we find that where employment is abundant, and where remuneration is good, there is a tendency to forget God and to attribute all to self. Their heart is lifted up, but not in the ways of the Lord. Theirs is not a holy exultation, not a sanctified joy. No grateful obligation of a grateful heart do they bring to God. "But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked; thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God Who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." In seasons of adversity and national calumny, the people of Israel cried unto God, and sought from Him deliverance; but when the darkness was passed and the sun of prosperity again shone upon them, they forgot God. "According to their pasture so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted,"—that is, lifted up,—therefore have they forgotten Me."

II. SOME MEN WHOSE HEARTS ARE NOT LIFTED UP ARE IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD.

They are real Christians, but doubting, desponding Christians. The causes that contribute to their depression may be either physical or spiritual. The influence of body and mind is reciprocal. No doubt the mind has power over the body. So teaches Solomon. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones." But it is equally true that the body has power over the spirit. We are to a great extent the creatures of the seasons and the sky. A clear day or a cloudy one will often make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness, comfort and misery. There are those who give every evidence of conversion, who yet gloomily conclude that they have no part nor lot in the matter, and that their heart is not right in the sight of God. And wherefore? There is no reason why they *should*, but the reason why they *do* is to be found in something beyond the preacher's province. And until there is a change in their physical economy, all the succours of religion will be urged in vain. Such persons will go to their minister for comfort, when they ought rather to go to their physician for advice. They are in the ways of the Lord, but through physical causes, their soul is cast down and disquieted within them. Sometimes this depression arises from spiritual causes. Comparing what they ought to be with what they are, they are led to doubt their acceptance with God. They mistake the degree of their Christian experience, for the ground of their hope, and their confidence varies with their frames. When Peter withdrew his eyes from Jesus and fixed them on the waters, he began to sink, and terror took hold of his fainting spirit. In the Lord Jehovah we have righteousness and strength. His grace is sufficient for us—sufficient for us all—sufficient for us always—and were we only and ever looking to Jesus, our joy would be full and constant. Instead of this many a good man goes mourning all his days. He is in the position described by the Prophet Isaiah, and he would do well to ponder the Prophet's advice: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." He is walking in the ways of the Lord, going straight on in the path of duty, and no power can turn him aside, but he is walking in darkness; it is night with him providentially and spiritually, and his heart is not lifted up. Now, this case,

though not comparable to that of Jehoshaphat, which we shall shortly consider, is yet infinitely better than the first. Better be a doubting, desponding Christian, than no Christian at all. Better have an oppressed, a fearful, almost an agonizing conscience, scarcely less than the darkness of despair, than have a conscience that is seared as with a hot iron, a conscience that is sermon-proof. Indeed, the first case is the very worst conceivable; for if a man be not in the ways of the Lord, it would be far better for him not to have his heart lifted up at all. The sense of dissatisfaction may send him to the Saviour, Who alone can supply his need. "Blessed are they that mourn," to whom mourning has taught the need of celestial consolations.

III. SOME MEN HAVE THEIR HEARTS LIFTED UP, LIKE JEHOSHAPHAT, IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD.

The Christian need not doubt, need not despond; it is his privilege to rejoice, to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice always. He need not waste his time in sighing, he may pursue his way with songs. Being in the ways of the Lord, he ought to have his heart lifted up, ay, even though he may not, like Jehoshaphat, have "riches and honour in abundance." It is his privilege to "glory in tribulations; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." He can say, "These light afflictions which are but for a moment, are working out for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. There may be storms around, but the path is peace, if there is peace in the traveller's heart. "The peace of God, keeping the heart within, will beam out on the untrodden way, and gild its jagged sides with gladness." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

Let the Christian man whom God hath prospered in the world, compare his condition with that of others, and with what it once was; and as he reviews the way in which he hath been led, and sees how "the lines have fallen to him in pleasant places, and how he hath a goodly heritage"; let him say "Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Some of you began life in humble circumstances; you can remember a time when you had no inheritance, no, not so much as to set your foot on; and if any one had foretold that you would have come to riches and honour in abundance, you would not have believed it. Surely with Jacob you will say, "Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Surely you will retire before the Lord as did David, and say, "O Lord God, what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God, but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come; and is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" Thus continually and gratefully recognise the hand of God in all your mercies. Repress pride and self-sufficiency. Guard against those occasions and circumstances of temptation peculiar to a state of prosperity and abundance. Ever keep in mind how undeserving you are of benefits so rich and so numerous. Consecrate yourselves and all your blessings to the Lord, and strive the more you receive at His hand the more to prepare for giving in an account of your stewardship. "So shall your hearts be ever lifted up in the ways of the Lord."

Jehoshaphat

BY VEN. J. A. HESSEY, D.C.L.

*"Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace," etc.—
2 Chronicles xix. 1-3.*

I have to describe to you a man, not lost, but continually in danger of being lost; a man not wicked, but weak; a man, possessing in his character much that was good, but allowing his goodness to be sullied by approach to evil and evil men. I have to show you how one ill-considered step, in the earlier part of his career, embarrassed his whole reign; fettering him with engagements which he must have felt undesirable, if

not unlawful, but which he had not strength of mind, we should rather say principle, sufficient to disavow or break asunder; and how, though he was saved at the last, he dimmed the lustre of his earthly, and it may be, of his Heavenly crown.

Asa, the father of Jehoshaphat, has gone down to his grave. The solemnities of his magnificent funeral are over: and his people have turned themselves with anxiety to await the policy of his successor. He soon exhibits himself to be a vigorous as well as a religious prince. He strengthens his fortresses; he disciplines and officers his army; he builds castles and cities of store; and takes every measure in his power, not merely to confirm his sway in Judah, but to retain the cities of Israel which his father had taken. And as far as religion is concerned, he follows the line pursued by Asa—no God save Jehovah is recognized—whatever observances of the Sodomites had escaped the early vigilance of his predecessor, or had sprung up again as his faith declined, are put down with a strong hand; the high places, those old causes of offence, are discouraged, if not entirely destroyed; and he seems to have turned his attention to educating the mass of the people. Princes, priests, and Levites, the high and the instructed classes, are sent by him throughout the cities of Judah to spread the knowledge of the law.

For all this he has his reward. The Lord is with Jehoshaphat; the fear of him falls upon all the kingdom round about. Edom, though perhaps restless, and mindful of Isaac's prophecy, submits quietly to the king-depute who is sent from Judah. Some tribes of the Philistines, and even of the Arabians, give him tribute in money or in flocks and herds; and Ahab himself, the ambitious king of Israel, is at peace with him.

Thus far, brethren, all was well. But now commences the questionable part of his career; now he does that thing which at once affects the whole tenor of his reign, and gives us the first evidence that his character was weak and undecided; that though, on reflection, easily led back to good, he was, from impulse, or want of thought, too easily perverted to evil. Who and what Ahab was, and who and what Jezebel, his queen, could scarcely have been unknown to Jehoshaphat. As a wise and religious man he must have mourned over the idolatry and wickedness which spread from their court over Israel; yet into their family he permits his son, Jehoram, to marry. It may be that he was ambitious; that he believed that this alliance might spread his influence to Sidon, the native country of Jezebel. It may be that he was what worldly men call "politic"; that he desired to cement his peace with Israel by this affinity; or it may be that he thought of converting Ahab's views into a better and holier channel. But from whatever motive he acted, he committed the grievous sin of marrying his son to Athaliah, the idolatrous daughter of idolaters. Of course, this act of weakness by no means stood alone. When did a man commit one sin, without being drawn into another? Jehoshaphat pays a visit of friendship to Ahab. He is received with hospitable splendour—flattered, caressed, and honoured. He is not proof against this. Ahab has a war in hand against Syria, and requests Jehoshaphat's aid. It was impossible for the weak king to refuse. Could he think of denying any thing to his son's father-in-law, and his own courteous entertainer? It would be so unkind, so ungenerous; it would hurt the feelings of his friend. "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." He only makes one condition—that inquiry should be made of the Lord.

Well had it been for him, had he sought God's sanction at the beginning, before he had set out on his journey. But men make up their minds first, and then profess to ask for counsel. The crafty Ahab interposes no difficulty; the prophets of the court are summoned, in number at least four hundred. They have learnt their lesson very well, and predict, with edifying unanimity, a victory at Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat is not satisfied; he demands a prophet of the Lord. Ahab produces one with some reluctance; the prophet's name is Micaiah. Then ensues a striking scene. Micaiah, in bitter irony, probably to show how easily pretensions to prophecy are assumed, at first professes to confirm the utterances of the false prophets. But his tone belies his words. Ahab adjures him to speak the truth. At length he does so. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd, and the Lord said, These have no master: let them return, therefore, every man to his house in peace." And then, in that bold apologue with which you are all familiar, "while the two kings sat majestically on their thrones, he tells them of a more glorious throne than theirs, whereon he saw the God of kings sitting. While they were compassed about with some hundreds of prophets and thousands of subjects and soldiers, he tells

them of all the host of Heaven, attending that other throne. While they were deliberating of war, he tells them of a God of Heaven, justly decreeing the judgment of a deadly deception to Ahab."

One would think, that after this, Jehoshaphat's course had been clear. God's blessing was not upon the expedition. If Micaiah was a prophet of God—which his worst enemies could not deny—and if his words meant anything, Ahab was himself to fall, and his fall might involve his ally. We earnestly hope to read that Jehoshaphat has separated from Israel, and that his heralds are sounding a proclamation of return at once to Jerusalem. Alas! it is not so. He has not one word of intercession to offer for the oppressed Micaiah, whom Ahab menaces and imprisons. And he acts, for a religious man, sinfully; for a prudent man, unadvisedly; for a king, whose life is valuable to his own subjects, unwarrantably. Ahab has, no doubt, heard that his own life is the special mark of the Syrians. At any rate, he determines to save it by disguising himself. But Jehoshaphat is to put on his robes, and to exhibit himself as the general. This piece of foolish good-nature nearly cost him his life. The Syrians supposed him to be the king of Israel, and pressed him fiercely with their attacks. It was only "when Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him," that they were moved to depart from him. As for the wicked Ahab, how vain his precautions were; how a bow drawn at random, drawn contrary to the king of Syria's injunctions, sped an arrow against him: this belongs to another history. Our sympathies, and our narrative, are occupied with the weak but not unrighteous Jehoshaphat. We rejoice to find from our text that he escaped unharmed from the battle; that he returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem.

We trust that he returned thither a sadder and a wiser man; that his conscience had already reproached him with what he had done; and that he made many earnest resolves of firmer and more consistent conduct. And we may not doubt that this was the case. Jehu, the son of Hanani, the seer, went out to meet him. His words were words of rebuke; yet the humbled monarch did not resent them as Asa, his father, had on a somewhat similar occasion resented the words of Jehu's father; and, probably, because he did not resent them, words of encouragement were added. "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek the Lord." The king does not answer in words—perhaps his heart is too full—but his deeds are more eloquent by far than any words could have been. He commences anew his efforts for the religious welfare of his people; he visits personally the whole of his kingdom as a royal missionary of the truth—he reforms the courts of law in Jerusalem—he makes ample provision for the administration of justice by setting judges in every city; and, though some, perhaps, might reproach him with his own want of moral courage in what he had so recently done, he does not scruple to say to the officers whom he appointed, "Deal courageously, and the Lord shall be with the good."

The next event in his life is a pleasing one. It would seem that soon after his return he was threatened by a formidable confederacy of Ammonites, Moabites, and other predatory tribes, as the Edomites of Mount Seir, who appeared among the rich gardens of Engedi, to the west of the Dead Sea. Jehoshaphat does not essay an expedition without consulting God; and a prophet is sent to comfort him by a promise of Divine deliverance. His army then sets out in the guise rather of a religious procession than of a band of warriors. Arrived at the field of action, it remains motionless, singing praise to the Lord God. A misunderstanding breaks out among the enemy; they turn their arms one against the other; they fall in multitudes by mutual slaughter; and Judah has only to plunder their camp, and to bless God for the victory He has wrought for them.

It is painful to turn from this scene to Jehoshaphat's next act; to find that though Ahab is dead, the spell of that fatal affinity is still about the king of Judah. Ahaziah, Ahab's son, is notorious for his great wickedness; yet Jehoshaphat joins himself to him, and undertakes with him a commercial enterprise. No doubt, if he argued at all, he said, "This does not involve personal intercourse, it is merely a partnership in capital for the good of our respective peoples; it is a fair and legitimate opening for industry and energy. And did not Solomon himself build vessels at the very port at which ours will be built? Did not he thus convert the Red Sea into a servant, and bring abundant riches, the productions of Ophir and Tarshish, and many a region

besides, into his treasury?" When a man has determined upon a thing, he has arguments enough to support it. But however he argued, he was wrong; and a prophet, Eliezer, was sent to rebuke him. "Because thou hast joined thyself to Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works." The ships were broken at Ezion-geber without setting out on their voyage. Jehoshaphat, we may believe, saw his error, for on Ahaziah's desiring to renew the attempt, and to associate their crews together, it is really a relief to read, "Jehoshaphat would not."

Ahaziah dies soon after, and Jehoram, his brother, is his successor. His character is shortly summed up in Holy Scripture. "He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord"; there is only this palliation of it, "but not like his father and like his mother; for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made." It may be that Jehoshaphat had heard of this partial attempt at amendment; and that it opened his heart towards him. Shall he not take him by the hand? shall he not encourage him by his own personal example? It is strange, however, that one who had been rebuked for allying himself with Ahab, and for allying himself with Ahaziah, should so unhesitatingly league himself with Jehoram. He is requested by him to take part in repelling an invasion of the Moabites, who had shaken off their allegiance to Israel on hearing of Ahab's death. His very reply to the request is suggestive of sad memories. We wonder he did not recall an occasion on which he used the same words. "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, and my horses as thy horses." Surely there must have risen up before him, that morning when "in the void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria," two kings were sitting, clothed in royal apparel, and girt by a glorious and splendid assembly; and that evening at Ramoth-Gilead, when one of those kings lay dead in his chariot, and the other had escaped, with difficulty, from the hands of the warriors of Syria. But Jehoshaphat uses them without scruple this second time. And without consulting God, he summons the tributary king of Edom and his forces, and takes the field with Jehoram. How distress and drought overtook the army of the three confederates; how Elisha came to their assistance, and declared that for the sake of Jehoshaphat, the Lord would deliver them; how a miracle was wrought, at once to relieve their necessities, and to mislead the hosts of the enemy, we may not pause to tell. It is more important to observe how Jehoshaphat appears in the transaction. That ancient fault, his evil alliance, is still entangling him; his temper of too easy compliance has not yet deserted him; he is indeed, as ever, amiable and well-meaning; he is not like those who admit seeking God altogether, but he seeks God too late; he seeks Him after acting, or in the midst of action, instead of before commencing action; and so he has to seek Him with compunction and bitter repentance, with the tears of the returning prodigal, rather than with the trust of the son who ever leans on his father, ever humbly consults his will.

Yet Jehoshaphat was saved at the last; saved, not indeed, as one of the chief of saints, but still saved. The words of the prophet Elisha are sufficient to prove this. "Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look towards thee, nor see thee," is his declaration to the king of Israel. Inspired men speak not thus of those who are rejected by the Almighty. Yes, even though Jehoshaphat had sinned, sinned often, repented often, and then sinned again almost in the same way as before, the prophet, representing God, sees that in him which he may encourage and love. We believe, brethren, that He Who called Abraham His friend, though he twice, and each time under the same temptation, showed want of moral courage—He Who forgave Peter, though he thrice denied his Lord—has also forgiven Jehoshaphat, blotted out the remembrance of his weakness, and received him, for His dear Son's sake, into Paradise, the vestibule of Heaven. How different the end of Asa! The last words we read of him are, "He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians; and Asa slept with his fathers." Jehoshaphat, too, sleeps with his fathers; but, in spite of the many faults in his character, in spite of his many indecisions, he had, before he died, borne of him, by the mouth of a prophet, this testimony, that he pleased God; and it will be confirmed at the resurrection of the just.

I shall have spoken to little purpose, brethren, unless you have seen already the great, the extreme danger to which a lack of firmness is likely to expose a man. You have noted how that affinity with Ahab's family, contracted without consideration of consequences, affected more or less the whole life of Jehoshaphat. And you have observed that this act of his did not stand alone; that it was but the first of a series of acts more or less sinful, but all of them so sinful, that had God called him hence while he was engaged

in any one of them, we should have had most serious doubts as to his being accepted.

Now, should not this make us cautious? Cautious, first in such serious matters as forming family connexions, or partnerships in businesses or professions. It is a grave, a very grave thing, to be brought in continued, in inevitable intercourse with those whose maxims of living we cannot agree with in conscience, yet cannot disagree with in comfort. We may, it is true, fancy that we shall win them to our side. Alas! such is human nature, we are more likely silently to be led to theirs; to be induced, by little and little, to adopt those very principles, or live as though we had adopted them, of which we once thought unfavourably. "He that toucheth pitch" (says the son of Sirach) "shall be defiled therewith; and he that hath fellowship with a proud man shall be like unto him." "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God." These are the words of St. Paul, and they interpret the law by the Gospel; they convert the rebuke of Jehoshaphat in the text into a standing admonition to the Christian.

But it should also make us cautious in what appear minor things. Let me just explain what I mean. Observe the man who is over-persuaded to what he believes to be evil; the man who says, I will act at once, for if I reflect I shall draw off; the man who consents to do what is wrong, and justifies himself by saying, Some good will come out of it; the man who frequents the society of the vicious, yet believes that he can escape corruption; the man who enjoys the jests of the profane, yet supposes that his mind can retain its reverence for holy things; the man who is silent when he should declare openly his disapprobation of evil; the man who runs himself into temptation, yet trusts that God will find him a way out of it. All these persons do, in their measure and degree, expose themselves to danger—commit acts of indecision—sin against their better judgment, or what would, on reflection, be their better judgment—take a step which may necessitate others, against which they may exert themselves in vain—impress a stain on their conscience, which it may require years to efface—and plant on the soil of their souls a weed so vivacious, so self-spreading, so absorbent of moisture and nutriment, that by and by it may choke the growth of all Christian graces and virtues.

It is true, indeed, that, after all, we may be saved. Jehoshaphat's history tells us this; but wherefore, brethren, is it recorded? to encourage us to continue in our sin, and to acquiesce without a struggle in our weakness? Not so, surely. It is recorded to encourage us to desert the one, to arouse ourselves from the other; to induce us, though we feel past sins entangling us, to break their meshes; though we have fallen, not to despair; though we even repeat the transgression of which we believed we had repented thoroughly, to make further and more vigorous efforts to avoid it. It is recorded, moreover, to assure us that God is ever taking opportunities to recall us; that He is ever watching, if by chance He can find an inlet to the sinner's heart; ever more ready to foster his faintest, his most latent good tendency into action, than to condemn him irrevocably for his uncertain and wavering resolution;

"What, fallen again? Yet cheerful rise,

Thine Intercessor never dies."

Perhaps some one may hear me who has lamented his indecision; who has felt in himself a yearning for better things, but has never realized better things; has gone on, week after week, and month after month, and year after year, in courses which his better judgment disapproves. Is such a person to have hope, because Jehoshaphat was saved? No, brethren, he cannot hope, unless he resembles that king, not merely in his self-reproach, but in his renewed efforts for firmness after every fall; unless, when reminded of God, he prays to Him, and, though late, consults Him; unless, when conscious that he has dishonoured his holy calling, he lays himself out to honour it; unless, when rebuked for sin, he is penitent and humble; unless, when solicited to renew his sin, he has the courage to say, "The Lord being my helper, I will not." Then, indeed, he may take hope; then Jehoshaphat's history has been both written for him, and written not in vain.

Ahab

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"But there was none like unto Ahab," etc.—1 Kings xxi. 25.

After several successions, cut short by treason and murder, we come to the reign of one who is mentioned as having exceeded in wickedness all that had gone before him, though his father Omri had similarly outdone his predecessors, and handed down to him, as it were, the patrimony of improving in iniquity. But so had his father exhausted all means for this at home, that Ahab was obliged to go abroad for it. He soon passed the bounds, which had been hitherto observed, in the original sin of Jeroboam, the founder of the kingdom. In setting up the calves for worship at Dan and Bethel, that king had gone upon the principle of Aaron in the wilderness, and intended these as symbolical representatives of the Lord God of Israel. But such a beginning having been once made, there is no point at which the superstition can stop short of the extreme of idolatrous grossness. It had probably come to this in the mind of Omri and his countrymen, and the symbol been turned into a reality. Bred up in such a religion, a wiser man than Ahab might have done as he did. So far from entertaining any abhorrence for the idolatry of the surrounding heathen, he would rather prefer it to his own. The calves at Dan and Bethel, with their corresponding rites, must have appeared rude and dull, compared with the beautiful sculptures that represented Divinity, the deep mysteries which were pretended, the graceful and interesting legends that were told, and the imposing spectacles that were exhibited in the worship of the Phœnicians and Syrians, who had been polished to the utmost refinement of the civilization of their day, the former by maritime, the latter by inland commerce. It is not, therefore, any matter of wonder, that when he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, she had little difficulty in the wife's usual task of bringing her husband over to her own religion. In that very step he had bidden adieu to the law of the Lord God of Israel, which so severely prohibited intermarriages with the idolatrous nations that were left in the land; if, indeed, he had even given allegiance to a law, the essential point of which had been violated long ago, in setting up a rival place of sacrifice: he was, therefore, introduced to the worship of her national god, Baal, and went and served and worshipped him, building a temple for him at Samaria, where, also, he dedicated a grove to another of her deities, Astarte, or the Moon. Thus, though there survived a remnant of the worship of the Lord God, Ahab had done all that could extinguish it, and produce the utter alienation of his subjects from the God of their fathers. He did, therefore, more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

Ahab, however, was grievously mistaken, if he thought seriously for one moment, and expected to dethrone the Lord without a struggle. The King of kings had not forgotten His people whom He had redeemed, but was willing to give them an opportunity of returning. Sending to seek that which was lost, He commissioned Elijah to go forth, and present himself before Ahab, and proclaim to him a cessation of dew and rain for three years. If the threat moved Ahab for a moment, the instigation of Jezebel soon removed his uneasiness, and she obtained from his indifference, if not from his good will, the power of persecuting the Prophets of the Lord, who, in spite of the example set by the court, and of the influence which it exerted among the higher classes, amounted to so large a number, that a hundred were concealed from her vengeance by Obadiah the governor of Ahab's household, who still, even in that position, retained his faithfulness to the Lord. The Lord Himself took care of Elijah; but the rest of the sacred body were cut off by Jezebel, who hated them of course most bitterly from the spirit of her deadly superstition, which could not endure even the silent rebuke of their holiness. Her cruelty, however, was fruitless. The Lord preserved a large remnant, and the famine was not stayed.

The three years had been accomplished, and Ahab was feeling the effects of the Lord's word through Elijah very painfully at Samaria. He had gone in search of some water that he might save his cattle from perishing. In his way he was met by Elijah, who presented himself before him by the Lord's order. Instantly his indignation was kindled. So little effect had the Lord's judgment produced upon him, so little had he

repented, and come to the acknowledgment of his sin, that, with the usual effrontery of a hardened heart, he charged Elijah with being the author of the calamities of the country. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" he cried. Jezebel, however, was not now at his side, and he could not resist the power of the man of God. He was persuaded to accept his challenge of meeting singly the whole body of the prophets, both of Baal and of Astarte, eight hundred and fifty in the whole. A numerous and compact army was this, indeed, compared with the small and scattered bands of the Prophets of the Lord, whose depressed condition was the more pitiable, inasmuch as it was the first time that they had suffered from their own rulers in their own country: and, meanwhile, the people tamely saw a foreigner destroying the salt of the earth among them, that alone which gave their body any vitality, and kept them under the Lord's wing. They found it in truth more pleasant to play than to pray, to be amused than to learn, to be flattered than to be admonished; to have a religion which should indulge them, rather than one which should restrain them, and which should minister to them the delights of sin rather than expose its guilt. Thus they allowed a foreign superstition to ride rampant over the land which the Lord had given them, and trample down their national institutions, which were Divine also. Thus their national spirit grew faint, and was finally extinguished, and they became an easy prey to the first powerful invader whom the Lord raised up against them.

This miserable omen, however, of the departure of the Lord from His people, and of the fulness of the cup of His displeasure, which at length overflowed in the judgment of their captivity, was averted for a time by the result of Elijah's challenge. Heaven had refused fire to light their sacrifice to the prophets of Baal, and had ministered it to Elijah for his: and Ahab himself for the moment was ready to confess that the Lord He is God, and the people, recovering their senses, obeyed the orders of Elijah, and slew all the prophets of Baal. A blessed day it was: for the Lord not only condescended to appeal to His people by a sign, but, in the moment that they answered the appeal, He removed the curse from them. The heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. How ready is He to turn! The slowness is with us. Every look that we cast towards Him meets with encouragement. He would detain it, and fixes it with a blessing. Alas! that any thing should ever be able to unfix it again.

Ahab was now put upon the right way, and in Elijah, the Lord had given him a leader who would have directed him and his people in the paths of God's continual favour. He might for a brief season have resolved to follow such guidance; but such a resolution, if made, soon melted away as wax before the fiery temper of Jezebel. Filled no less with alarm than with indignation, she sent a message to Elijah, threatening him with her vengeance for his slaughter of her prophets. The man of God was compelled to flee, and the work which he had wrought upon Ahab was undone. Again the king was seen at the head of the idolatrous party, and the people followed his example, and forsook the Lord's covenant, and threw down his altars, and returned to their former superstition so generally, that Elijah felt comparatively reassured when the Lord told him that He had yet seven thousand which had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Thus Ahab had proved himself irreclaimable by the first judgment of the Lord. A second therefore was prepared for him: and since famine had not subdued him, the sword was sent to bring him into order. It came from the very region whence Solomon had received stern notice of the Lord's displeasure at his idolatries. There the Lord had been nursing up for warlike enterprise the chastisers of His people, from the day that He put it into the hearts of the Syrians to revolt from Solomon's dominion, and set up an independent kingdom with Damascus for its capital. Its present king Benhadad invaded Ahab's territory with an overwhelming force, and shut him up under close siege in his capital. Like all that are possessed with spiritual folly, Ahab proved as great a coward against man, whom he saw, as he had blustered valiantly against the Lord, Whom he saw not. He sent a most humble submission, in answer to the haughty summons of the enemy, who demanded all that he had, to his very wives and children. But his promises of homage and tribute were met only with still more rigorous demands. He was not to be trusted in rendering his account, but was to submit on the morrow to a search made by officers of Benhadad, who were to take away every thing on which he set any value. Ahab was thus driven to despair. He called a council of elders, and, on their recommendation, broke off all negotiations. Benhadad, on receiving a defiance in return for his last threatening message, set his vast host in array for an assault.

Ahab had nothing to oppose in the field to such a multitude, nor could he hope long to maintain his walls against it. Where was he to look for help now?

But as in the former judgment, the Lord, when He had given Ahab and his people sufficient taste of it, so that they should remember Him once more, now interfered with His mighty arm, and sent a message to Ahab, directing him how to act. Thus advised, the king selected two hundred and thirty-two youths of the first families, and, adding to them seven thousand of the people, sent them forth on a sally. So utterly unexpected was so bold a measure, that Benhadad and his officers were drinking in all security, when the advance was announced to them. So suddenly were they attacked, and with such vigour, that the Syrian army were put to rout, and Ahab, then pouring forth from the city with his troops, completed the discomfiture, and pursued them with a dreadful slaughter, so that Benhadad himself escaped with great difficulty on horseback. Nor did the merciful deliverance of the Lord stop here. He counselled Ahab not to slacken his hand, but to prepare for another invasion at the return of the year. It came, and with a force so overwhelming for numbers, that, while they filled the country, the children of Israel, when pitched before them, seemed but as two little flocks of kids. Ahab, however, was again especially encouraged by the Lord, and, after abiding in view of the enemy for seven days, joined battle. He again routed the Syrians, of whom a hundred thousand were slain, and Benhadad himself, after a vain flight, was compelled to surrender. Such a taste of His mercy towards Ahab and his people, did the Lord now give in return for the bitter taste of His judgment, and Israel had again the call to effectual repentance, and the opportunity of finding deliverance from all enemies! But again the Lord was suffered to plead in vain.

Ahab treated his royal prisoner with great generosity: and no one would have blamed him for it, but praised so magnanimous a return for such indignant treatment, if he had won the victory with his own sword, and if Benhadad had been merely his own captive. But the victory was the Lord's, and the Lord had delivered the captive into his hands. If he did not know, therefore, the Lord's pleasure concerning him, as he might have done, had he but seriously considered the case, it was his business to inquire of the Lord. This he did not do: and it is clear, both from his own character, and from the Lord's notice of the transaction, that he acted from no feeling of moral magnanimity, still less of spiritual charity, but from mixed feelings, among which were the love of display, the sympathy with an idolater, and, perhaps, that traitorous infatuation, which, in the trials of their country, leads weak and wicked men to court enemies and foreigners in preference to friends and countrymen. Above all, he wanted faith in God, so that he should push fearlessly the success which God had given him, and refuse conditions when he should have felt that all had been put in his power. All these motives, added to a love of ease, led him to make a compromise where he should have decided. Feeble and unfaithful, he let slip from his hands the grand occasion which God had put into them, and let the mortal enemy of his country depart on easy conditions. So carelessly did he throw away this second mercy, when it had followed a judgment which he had called down so wickedly.

But while he might thus have been flattering himself that he had done great things, shown valorous conduct in the field, magnanimous behaviour in victory, he was interrupted by a message from the Lord. One of His Prophets came before him in disguise, pretending that he had lost a prisoner who had been committed to his charge in the battle, with the express assurance, that if he were missing, he should answer for him with his life or a ransom. As in the case of David, when Nathan came similarly before him, veiling his accusation in a parable, Ahab was convicted by the sentence out of his own mouth, and received from the mouth of the Prophet this terrible announcement, "Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." Downcast and displeased at such a message, he returned to Samaria, which he had expected to enter with very different feelings.

This second mercy, so ill applied, gave Ahab leisure from his foreign troubles, and thus, having no further opportunity by overt act of public disobedience to God, he gave vent to the overflowing sinfulness of his heart in domestic crime. He now exchanged the counsels of God, which had given him victory and honour, for the counsels of Jezebel, which could bring nothing but loss and shame, and did in effect contribute to work out that final judgment with which the Lord had threatened him. He looked around him at his palace in Samaria; and it seemed that occasion for sin met him

almost at the first glance. His eyes coveted a vineyard close adjoining. It appeared to be exceedingly convenient for an appendage to his palace; but Naboth its owner, in answer to his application to let him have it either by exchange or purchase, very properly refused to part with the inheritance of his fathers, which they had received, not at the hands of man, as in other countries, but at the hands of God in the division of the land to the people. The request of Ahab was contrary not only to natural feeling, but to religious feeling also. The king of Israel was not so absolute that he could compel such a party to compliance. Ahab therefore was obliged to forego the gratification of his desire, and retired to give vent to his disappointment in lying down with his face turned away, and refusing meat. This fit of pouting childishness was the very season for the work of the wicked Jezebel. On learning the cause of his grief, she indignantly rebuked him for his want of spirit in allowing opposition to the will of a king of Israel, "Dost thou govern the kingdom of Israel?" she asked him, and bade him leave the matter to her, and she would put him in possession of the vineyard. Ahab readily acquiesced, though he must have known, from Jezebel's character, that she had some desperate deed of fraud or violence in contemplation. How miserably weak was he thus to put himself, as it were, under her patronage, and how wicked to allow her to do a crime that he may reap the fruits of it! How destitute of all feeling to let the partner of his heart do that which he himself dared not to do, and how destitute of all sense to imagine that God would not impute it to him! In him at least the proverbial observation was true, which links fool and knave together. The means to which Jezebel resorted were of consummate wickedness. Through subornation of perjury, she procured the death of Naboth, who suffered by stoning as a blasphemer, and then she triumphantly bade Ahab go and take possession.

Ahab accordingly went, in all the delight of the gratification of his greediness. But he had not been long there, before he unexpectedly met one who had come to dispute ownership with him, whom there was no buying off, nor disposing of in any other way. The word of the Lord had sent His Prophet Elijah to meet him on the spot of his crime. And in the very act of taking possession, he received a summary notice to quit. A most unwelcome sight, indeed, to the covetous eyes of Ahab was this of the Prophet; he knew at once that he had no good to expect from him. His conscience plainly assured him of that, when in the field, which was the wages of sin, he met the messenger of Him Who awards death as such wages. Surprised, terrified, and indignant, he cried out, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" But conscience made him a coward, and restrained his hand from violence; neither would God allow him to do His Prophet harm. He, therefore, endured to hear out the sentence which Elijah was commissioned to pronounce. A terrible one, indeed it was; it inflicted violent death on himself and his wife, with insult and dishonour to their corpses. Ahab quailed under the terrible denunciation. He had witnessed with his own eyes part of the awful example here proposed, and he had experienced the truth of the words of the Prophet, both for good and for evil, sufficiently to assure him that his words would not fail now. For once in his life, he felt the sharpness of the two-edged sword of God's word, and writhed and groaned under the agony of the smart. He rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly, exchanging the brisk step of worldly enjoyment for the slow and solemn gait of penitential sorrow.

Nor was this repentance feigned; as far as it went, it was real. His sense of the enormity of the deed came, indeed, from the painfulness of the consequences; but is not this the common moving cause of repentance in gross sinners? The work which ends in the filial love of God, must in such, begin with the slavish fear of Him. Before they can apprehend His mercy of forgiveness, they must stand before Him under the conviction of their sin, and the terror of Almighty justice. The repentance, therefore, of Ahab was accepted of God, Who promised, through Elijah, that He would spare him the sight of the evil which was to come upon his house, and defer it until after his days. And thus God at the same time vindicated His justice in the face of Israel, by humbling their king, and exhibited His mercy by raising him up again.

But why do we assert, that Ahab's repentance was but one of fear? not from the previous character of the man only, which, though probable, is insufficient evidence, but also from its fruits, which we are now about to behold. The tremendous defeat of the Syrians had kept them now quiet for three years. They had, however, been so slow in surrendering, according to treaty, their conquests, that they still retained Ramoth-gilead, and so much the rather, inasmuch as its possession was the very type

of the fortune of war, the place having been always the grand bone of contention between the rival kingdoms. Ahab found in this a cause of war, and engaged Jehoshaphat king of Judah to join him. But that king feared God, and, as a faithful servant to the King of kings, did not think that they should engage in such an enterprise, without inquiry of God. Ahab, therefore, assembled all his prophets, to the immense number of four hundred; and they all with one mouth seconded his determination for war. Jehoshaphat, however, was not satisfied with all this unanimity, and asked for another Prophet of the Lord. Micaiah was then introduced. He had been in disgrace, if not in prison, for having spoken the truth, when it had been contrary to the king's inclination, and because he would not prophesy good concerning him, but evil. But how should the wicked man ever listen to a Prophet of the Lord? Will he seek rebuke, will he court judgment, will he delight in the word of Him Whose commandments he is disobeying, will he go after counsels which are contrary to the spirit of his enterprise? If princes, like Ahab, put away wise men, and surround themselves with flattering fools, how much more will they avoid the presence of a man of God, who speaks the wisdom which they mock, and the truth which they dread? Ahab, therefore, in his infatuation, disregarded Micaiah's message, although it was announced with unusual solemnity, unveiling even the awful secrets of Heaven, representing the Lord God on the Throne of His glory, with the host of Heaven on His right hand and on His left, and a lying spirit coming before Him, and commissioned to put a lie into the mouth of Ahab's prophets, that they may persuade him to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead. But all this unusual solemnity, wasted as it would be on Ahab, was, doubtless, intended to impress Jehoshaphat, a man of a very different character. Yet, such was the infatuation of evil company, that even he suffered himself to be carried away. So the two kings joined forces, and went up against Ramoth-gilead. The Syrians hastened to relieve it, and a bloody battle ensued. Ahab now experienced the fruits of his kind treatment of Benhadad, who proved how little the greatest kindness can effect a heart hardened with worldly covetousness and ambition, and manifested how, while he prized the benefit, he cared not for the benefactor. He issued special orders to his captains of chariots, that they should single out the King of Israel. Ahab seems to have had some intimation of this, since he went disguised into the battle, and Jehoshaphat, who entered it clad in his royal robes, being mistaken for him, was in imminent hazard of his life. All his precaution, however, did not save Ahab. The strokes designed for him missed him, but a random shot from a bow reached him, and inflicted a fatal wound, so that he died in the evening.

They brought his body to Samaria; and there, as they were washing his chariot, which had been filled with his blood, in the pool of Samaria, the dogs came and licked up the blood. Thus was fulfilled in him the prophecy of Elijah; and a terrible earnest was given of that which remained to be fulfilled to his wife and children. How miserable must have been the last hours of Ahab, if he had been a man of common feeling and common attention to the word of God, when he knew that he was bequeathing to his family so dreadful a legacy!

In the eyes of sinful man, God's strength seems weakness, His wisdom appears to be folly; and, therefore, God answers man according to his folly, and conveys to him reproof and instruction through the examples of fools and insignificant characters, such as that of Ahab. In his, the wisest may find instruction, the most powerful discover their weakness and tremble; but the wisest too often show how all their wisdom is but folly before God, by thinking the lessons that may be drawn from fools so simple, that they despise them, and overlook their warnnig. Jehoshaphat, a man of no common wisdom, was near to paying a severe penalty for such neglect. Ahab was, indeed, a man of weak mind and unprincipled conduct. But may not every one that steadily contemplates his character see reflected, as in a glass, the weakness and folly of his natural man, and see what he has to guard against, in addition to that which his own experience tells him that he has to guard? May he not thus be convinced of the great infirmity and inclination to evil, the chicanery and self-conceit, the audaciousness as to God, and cowardice as to the world, which lurks in the human heart, and requires patient watchfulness, under the help of the Holy Spirit, that it should be overcome and kept inert?

In a public view also, as a wholesome lesson to nations how Almighty God can control the fate of the most powerful of them with the weakest instruments, and empty the full channel of their prosperity with the scoop of his hand, Ahab's character is one of

deep and melancholy interest. It displays in clear lines the irreparable mischief which can be done to society by a character, however intrinsically insignificant, when external circumstances have exalted it into a situation among the public agents of the world. As surely as in the weak Claudius, the giver of the first donative to the Prætorian soldiery, we see all the future calamities of the Roman empire, occasioned, as they were, by the military licence thus introduced, and in him look on, through Domitian, to Alaric and Attila, so in the weak Ahab we see, through Hoshea and Manasseh, to the children of Israel hanging their harps on the willows of the waters of Babylon; for by this unlawful marriage with Jezebel, he introduced idolatry into both the royal lines, and poisoned the fountains of religion both to Israel and Judah. And the more sad is this lesson, because wiser and better men than Ahab have failed here, and overlooked their public duty in their private gratification. Jehoshaphat, in this very instance, followed Ahab's example, by marrying into his idolatrous family. How blind, indeed, are we, when even they that have the clearest sight amongst us, and should be our guides, can be so blinded as not to foresee the scandal which they bring upon their high profession, the detriment which they do to their own efficacy, and the train of evils which they bequeath to that posterity for which they were appointed, in their day, to provide good! In truth, we are none of us mere individuals, we are all, more or less, well-heads of persons, characters, and consequences, deriving from us, to the end of the world, as long as one event shall give birth to another. What a sin, then, is selfishness: how abhorrent from the love of God, in which we love our brethren; from the love of Christ, in which we love brethren in Christ, to the last days of His Church on earth. Can we be innocent, and for the gratification of a present desire, however innocent it may appear absolutely in itself, risk the loss of spiritual happiness to numbers which we cannot count, and to an extent which we cannot estimate? A straw will show the direction of the wind; a feather will declare the tendency of a stream; a spark will bring on the conflagration of a city; a rag will spread deadly contagion through a kingdom; so does God bid the wisest take heed to the most insignificant things in the world. And surely He has not set Ahab before our eyes in vain.

Ahab

BY RIGHT REV. REGINALD HEBER, D.D.

"But there was none like unto Ahab," etc.—1 Kings xxi. 25.

It may perhaps be no unprofitable exercise to examine into the leading features of a character so severely reprobated by God's Spirit; and which received a punishment so exemplary:—and most happy will it be for our souls, if we are enabled, on such inquiry, to amend in ourselves any lurking point of likeness, which we may there discover, to the wretched husband of Jezebel.

Of all the kings of Israel the besetting sin was idolatry; a crime against which the Almighty had levelled His severest censures; and to correct the advances of which He had sent, in each successive generation, a succession of inspired and holy men, as prophets and teachers of His word; whose miracles and judgments were sufficient, as may be thought, to enforce, even on the most obstinate offenders, a knowledge of their duty, and a sense of their danger. In spite of all, however, the kings, and people, of Israel persevered in the error of their ways; till their total departure from the true faith and acceptable worship of God was punished by the utter overthrow of their crown and country, and the transportation of all who did not perish in battle, to dwell as slaves in the country of their invaders.

This obstinacy in error may seem to demand explanation. It may be therefore well to inform you, that, having rebelled from their rightful sovereigns, the kings of Judah,—the rulers of Israel, as we read in the 12th chapter of this same Book of Kings, were anxious to keep the ten tribes, which obeyed their authority, as much divided as possible from the two which remained faithful to the family of David.—With this view, Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, under pretence of saving his people the trouble of going twice in every year to offer sacrifices at Jerusalem in the temple by Solomon,—the place which God Himself had appointed,—brought back, by the full force of his example and

authority, the old idolatry of the golden calf, which the tribes had worshipped in Horeb : and he had the audacity to proclaim once more, in defiance of all God's judgments and threatenings, that these were a fit representation of the God, Who brought them out of the land of Egypt.

To this national and customary transgression of the Divine laws, Ahab was persuaded to add a new and still more unpardonable abomination, in worshipping the idol of the Sidonians, Baal, or the Sun. I call this error still more unpardonable than the sin of Jeroboam, because this was an absolute departure from the worship of the true God ; whereas that of the golden calves was only worshipping God under an absurd and degrading form. The worshippers of the golden calves, however strange it may appear, did not mean to adore any other Divinity than the Jehovah, Who made both earth and Heaven, and Who had brought their forefathers out of the land of Egypt. They broke the second commandment, in fancying that they could represent by this image, the strength, and swiftness, of the unseen God : and they were doubtless most absurd in transforming the similitude of their glory to the likeness of an ox that eateth grass ; and most guilty in transgressing, from motives of worldly prudence, the two positive commands of God : the first in pretending to make any image or likeness of Him ; the second in offering their sacrifices anywhere else, than at Jerusalem, where He had commanded.

But the worshippers of Baal were not content with adoring, as the true God, an image made with hands :—they sinned against the first command, no less than against the second ; inasmuch, as in the person of their fancied thunderer, they set up an absolute rival to Jehovah ; and, by paying their vows and prayers and sacrifices to another, declared, in no doubtful language, that the God of their forefathers should not be their King.

The question between the followers of Jeroboam, and those faithful Israelites who still continued to worship at Jerusalem, was only whether God might lawfully be worshipped at Bethel ; and whether it were right to represent His glory by a golden image :—but they were both agreed, that the Lord only was to be adored and honoured. The question between the prophets of the groves, and Elijah, was, whether the Lord, or Baal, was God?—and while Elijah exhorted his countrymen to return to the worship of Jehovah, the agents of Jezebel attempted to persuade them that it was not Jehovah, but Baal, who was the proper object of prayer. It was the worship of this idol, which Ahab, king of Israel, allowed his wife to introduce into the land ; and which he himself was led, by her example, to serve and honour ; though, at the same time, with an inconsistency which shall be hereafter explained, he continued himself to worship occasionally the true God, after the irregular and unlawful manner which Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had first, as we have seen, from worldly motives, introduced.

When, in punishment for the horrid massacre which the queen had instigated, of all the Prophets of the Lord, the windows of heaven were shut up for three years, so that no rain fell in the land of Israel ; though Ahab at first turned all his anger, not on his wicked wife, whose cruelty had brought this curse on his country, but on the Prophet Elijah, who had forewarned him of it, in order to his repentance ; yet when at length Elijah met him, the king, we find, is awed and overcome by the awful presence of him whom he had persecuted ; and yields a ready obedience to his injunctions, first in calling together all the prophets of Baal, to meet the one surviving teacher of righteousness, in a solemn trial of the truth of their different creeds ; and, afterwards, in putting to a merited death those bloody deceivers, who had so long persecuted the worshippers of the living God.

But, though, for this act of justice, he was immediately rewarded by the fertile rain which he had for three years desired ; and, though Elijah entered Jezreel with him, on terms of seeming reconciliation ; yet no sooner was the feeble mind of the king exposed to the arts of his wife, than he gives up at once to her vengeance that Prophet, by whose prayers his country had just been saved from ruin. In the evening of the first day, Elijah and Ahab are friends ; and the worship of the true God is restored by acclamation in Israel : in the morning of the second, Jezebel has sufficient power to drive away into the desert, as one who fled for his life, that person whom her husband, the king of the land, had the day before acknowledged as the appointed minister of the Most High. Not yet, however, were the sins or the follies of Ahab complete ; nor was the Lord of Heaven and earth weary, as yet, of showing him mercy. Benhadad, king of Syria, made war on Israel ;—a powerful and bloody conqueror, who had already two and thirty kings who served him, and whose army,

as he himself boasted, was so numerous, that the "dust of Samaria would not suffice for handfuls to all the people that followed him." In this distress, another Prophet was sent to Ahab, promising him deliverance and victory: and Ahab again, when victorious, from foolish lenity, or from a desire to obtain the friendship of an idolatrous king, thought fit to sacrifice the interests of his country to an imprudent peace; and let go out of his hand a tyrant "whom the Lord had appointed to utter destruction." for this, he was again threatened with ruin by a Prophet of the Lord; and again, so strange was his inconsistency, returned to his house in affliction;—angry with himself, and penitent.

How little, however, this penitence availed, against the destructive influence of Jezebel, appears by the history of Naboth's vineyard. This vineyard Ahab desired to purchase of its owner; nor was there any thing displeasing, or unfair, in the sight of God or of man, in the offer which he made, either to exchange on advantageous terms, or to give its worth in money. Being refused, however, and refused, as it may seem, with some degree of roughness, how striking a picture of a weak and selfish man does his conduct afterwards display. "He came into his house heavy and displeased, because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken; and he laid him down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread."

What a temper does this exhibit! Could not all the kingdom of Israel satisfy this man; unless he could get this little patch of ground, as a garden of herbs for his palace? What right had he to be displeased and heavy, because Naboth, possibly, did not know his own interest; or because, from whatever motive, he was unwilling to part with the heritage of his fathers? Yet, cannot the king of Israel, in this slight matter, endure contradiction to his will; and, like a peevish child, he refuses meat and drink; and lies down, and turns his head away from conversation or comfort. Wicked, however, as it doubtless was, to covet thus the property which he had no chance of obtaining honestly, it does not appear, that Ahab, for a moment, thought of seizing the vineyard by violence.

That was the suggestion of a worse and a bolder spirit than his—"Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

How was she to obtain it for him, she does not appear to have told. Perhaps his conscience would even yet have taken alarm at the idea of deliberate and wilful murder—wicked, however (he must have known her character), her designs undoubtedly were; and when he gave her his royal seal, and permission to use his name, in the orders which she sent forth, he made himself justly answerable for whatever horrors she might, by means of such a privilege, perpetrate.

I need not now repeat the wicked and artful manner, in which she brought Naboth to a cruel and shameful death; wicked, from the damnable hypocrisy, with which this worshipper of Baal pretended to prosecute a man for cursing the God of Israel; wicked and artful above all, inasmuch as it deprived an innocent man not only of his life, but of his character and good name: and,—by the laws against treason, which, in every country, ordain that the property of the guilty person shall go to the crown,—not only took away the life of the father, but the property also of the sons;—and thus obtained, in the natural course of things, possession of the envied vineyard!

And how does Ahab receive these bloody tidings?—like every other wicked man, who is also a weak one, he is glad that the thing is done, so that he did not do it himself; he rejoices most likely in the secrecy, with which it has been accomplished; and hopes, perhaps, by this new pretended zeal for the honour of God, not only to escape the censures, but to obtain the praise, of his formidable monitor, Elijah.

To the world, indeed, the death of Naboth, (so craftily had it been contrived) might have passed as an act of ordinary justice, or of a pure religious zeal. The people had been called together to fast, and to pray; that the greatness of Naboth's supposed blasphemy might be forgiven to the land. Two witnesses had appeared, who deposed to his having spoken the words laid to his charge; he was consequently condemned, and executed, in the usual and legal manner, appointed in such cases by God Himself. All, in the sight of men, was upright and regular. But there was one eye, by which the thoughts of Ahab's heart were seen, as he lay murmuring on his uneasy bed; one ear, which heard the counsel of Jezebel; and one upright Judge, to Whom the blood of Naboth cried from the ground, and by Whom the cry was not disregarded.

Ahab, as we have seen, was a man very easily influenced either to good or evil: when

Elijah reproved him, he repented, for the time, of his sins; and, like Herod under the rebukes of John, did many things, which he was commanded, gladly. But when Jezebel was by his side, there was no superstition, no cruelty, no violence, of which he was not capable; and the good advice, which he had received from the Prophet, and the good resolutions, which he had made during his presence, were scattered like a morning dream.

This conduct is notoriously common with irresolute sinners; and it springs, in all of them, from too great regard for their present ease or gratification, and from too little attention to past resolutions or to future consequences. And the cure for this is, whenever we are tempted to do that of which our conscience secretly disapproves, first, to consider immediately what our thoughts will one day be on the subject, when we are called to the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of our works; and secondly, to endeavour to drive out the fear of present trouble or self-denial, by the far greater and more reasonable terrors of future torment without end.

But further, Ahab, it is evident, was a man completely devoted to his own selfish gratification; and who could not therefore endure to have his wishes crossed in the smallest trifle. We have seen how he took to his bed in despair, on being refused permission to purchase a garden of herbs for his palace: and there is no doubt, that the envy and evil passions, which he thus indulged, had as natural a tendency to make him wish at least for Naboth's death, if not to murder him, as a drop of rain has, in falling on the ground, to return to the sea, from which it first evaporated. Since, therefore, a love of trifles may lead to such grievous crimes, we shall do wisely often to practise self-denial in small matters; and so to keep our hearts in check by due self-government, and so to occupy our attention with our lawful business, and with acts of piety and charity, as that our self-gratification shall have no room to grow into a weed so formidable as to choke up and overshadow all the better seeds around it. Selfishness is the child of idleness. Had Ahab governed Israel himself, and paid due attention to the business of his station, instead of committing all to Jezebel, he would have had other things to think of, than a new place for his garden of herbs.

Thirdly, it may be worth our notice to consider the manner in which Jezebel begins to persuade him to consent to the means, however wicked, which she might use to obtain for him the object of his desires; it is the artifice, by which, of all others, a weak and selfish mind is assailable—that of persuading him, that others will despise him for his tameness, if he did not, in such affairs, insist on his own way.—“Dost thou not govern Israel?” If I were king, would I suffer an insolent subject to cross my royal pleasure? Shall Naboth mock his sovereign to his face; and shall not that sovereign dare to revenge himself?

Had Ahab been a wise man, had he been a good or a firm man, he might have answered, “I should not be worthy to govern Israel, if I did not govern my own selfish passions. Verily I will govern Israel; and in governing it, I will govern both myself and thee!” This he might have said, but, instead of this, he took the very surest way to prove that he did not govern Israel, when he gave up, to be avenged on Naboth, his royal seal and royal authority, into the hands of a malicious woman.

But it may be of use to all of us, if we observe, that he, who, in persuading us to adopt any line of behaviour, persuades us by an appeal to our wicked passions, our pride, our resentment, our covetousness,—we may be sure, by that very circumstance, is not our real friend, and is not advising us for our advantage. And if we are desired to act thus, or thus, because a different conduct will appear too weak, too religious, too just, or too gentle, this very argument is a sufficient reason to examine with greater jealousy the advice which is given, lest it should lead us into some grievous sin.

Fourthly, we may remark, that, though Ahab did not himself contrive or execute the death of Naboth, yet, by taking advantage of this foul murder, and by keeping possession of the vineyard thus acquired, he made the guilt of it as much his own, as if he had, with his own hands, sent the victim of his avarice to the grave.—Accordingly, we are bound to restitution of every thing which has come unfairly into our possession; whether it be derived from our own sins, or from the sins of other men; whether we have ourselves obtained it by deceit, or it have descended to us from a wicked ancestor. Till restitution is made, the ill-gotten property will be a curse on ourselves and on our posterity; and though our sorrow may, like that of Ahab, induce God to indulge us with a little longer time for repentance; yet, if this repentance proceeds no further than the outward signs of grief,—than rending our clothes, and wearing sackcloth, and fasting, and going softly,—if we do not put away the accursed thing from us, and give it up to

the rightful person, or to the poor,—the curse of Naboth the Jezreelite will cleave, we may depend on it, to us and our posterity; till our houses are like the houses of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and of Ahab the son of Omri.

But lastly,—With Ahab, the root of all his offences lay deeper far, than in this unsteadiness of conduct which I have described. He was a man of no religious principle. He appears, indeed, to have believed in God; but he appears to have cared so little about the matter, that he served Baal, or Ashtaroah, or any other idol, which the bloody superstition of those around him might recommend.

Let it be remembered, then, that he, who does not love God above all things, will never love his brother properly: that, where we are wanting in our obedience to the first commandment, all the rest of the ten are likely to be disregarded. And that no resolutions of repentance or virtue can be availing or constant, which are not laid in faith unfeigned, and in earnest and continued prayer. That God may hear us, and help our endeavours, may He grant for the sake of His dear Son Jesus Christ our Saviour!

Ahab

BY REV. W. HARRIS.

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"—1 Kings xxi. 20.

Sweet and bitter fruit are often produced under the same conditions. Two fruit trees may stand in your garden side by side, drinking in the same rain and dews of heaven, turning their leaves to the same sun, and deriving nourishment from the same soil; yet, when the autumn comes, the one may bring forth the delicious russet apple, while upon the other there may be only the sour crab. What makes the difference? Certainly not different circumstances; there must be a radical difference in the nature of the tree. And what we see in nature we see often in the lives of men. Two in one family, nurtured with the same watchful care, may grow up, the one to be a blessing and the other a curse; and it is remarkable how one age is often famous for men whose characters are as opposite as the poles. Look at Richard Baxter and Judge Jeffreys; the first, one of the most saintly, scholarly men of the seventeenth century, turning by his holy life and labour almost a whole town from ungodliness to the profession of Christ, and leaving behind him works and a name which will live for generations; the other, a licentious, cowardly bully, defiling his high position by his unrighteous dealing, and going down to an untimely, dishonoured grave. Yet Jeffreys and Baxter had the same Bible, and were compassed about by the same powerful religious influence which was abroad in England at that time. And consider the two men in our text, Ahab and Elijah, men of the same highly favoured nation, partakers of the same religious privileges, yet the one ripening, day by day, for the judgment of Ramoth-Gilead, and the other for the chariot and horses of fire by which he was translated from earth to Heaven. What makes the difference in these men? Truly not circumstance or condition, but the disposition, the moral nature, leading one to turn all upon which his soul feeds into bitterness, the other to bring forth fruit to a blessed immortality.

I. A PAST PLAN AND A PRESENT ACTION.

"Hast thou found me?" A housebreaker laid his plans to rob a house. Silently, in the darkness of night, he hastened to his work; his feet were padded that he might tread softly; his hammer was covered with leather, that he might noiselessly wrench open safe and drawer; the very matches that he carried struck without a sound: he thought he had taken everything into account as he laded himself with treasure and prepared to depart. But the first step out of the house was into the arms of a detective; he is laid hold of by a grip that has in it all the strength of the British constitution—the all the power of English law. "Hast thou found me?" is the expression of his heart, if not of his lips. All his plan failed, because he did not put that detective into it. Haman thought he was sure to bring his scheme for the massacre of the Jews to a successful issue, and caused the gallows to be erected upon which Mordecai was to hang; but Esther was watching him all the time, and when she fastened his crime upon him in the presence of the king, he might have said, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" So it was in the case before us. The covetous king cast his eyes upon Naboth's little vineyard, and would have had God's commands set at nought (Lev. xxv.

23; Numb. xxxvi. 7) to gratify his desire. And though, when he could not get it, he was too cowardly to do anything beside sulk upon his bed, he had a wife who would stand at nothing. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite." And through the murder of the innocent man, she fulfilled her promise, and was soon in a position to say to her husband, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard." But one who had not been reckoned in this transaction said to another man, "Arise, and go down to meet Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth"; and so the monarch, just entering into his newly acquired property, is confronted by God's detective, Elijah, saying, "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?" And his guilty conscience forces from him the cry, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

II. THE POWER OF AN EVIL DISPOSITION TO DISTORT OUR ESTIMATE OF CHARACTER.

"Mine enemy." So Ahab regarded Elijah. What we see an object to be, depends very much upon the medium through which we view it. The most glorious landscape in the world will appear dull if looked at through a blackened glass, and the fairest face looks ugly if the mirror which reflects it is imperfect. When a man who is about to undergo a terrible operation hears the footstep of the surgeon who is to perform it, it is not to be wondered at, if, regarding him through the medium of the pain he is to inflict, he calls him for the moment his enemy. And as with a diseased body, so with a diseased mind. The criminal so regards the judge who passes sentence upon him, and we who are ministers of Christ often experience it. People avoid us because we tell them the truth; they misinterpret our motives, and do not understand that we only desire to bring blessing to their lives. So Ahab regarded Elijah, the truest friend he had in all the land, because he dared to speak openly to him concerning the fruit of his evil doings. We can imagine a blind man hastening ignorantly along a path which ends in a yawning precipice, striking to the earth the friend who lays hold of him to draw him back, or a drowning man eluding the stunning blow which his rescuer must deal out to him to make it possible to save him. Both these mistakes would be attended with fatal consequences: how much more when a human soul resists the warning of one who would lead him, even by stern reproof, if need be, from the ways of evil into the paths of right.

III. THE ESTIMATE WHICH GOD, BY ELIJAH, GIVES OF AHAH'S CHARACTER.

"Thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."

All slavery has a tendency to degrade a man, but if he is in bondage against his will, it is possible for him to retain some, yea all, his nobility of nature. He at least feels that his chains are not of his own putting on. But there have been men, sold by others, who have sunk so low as to be satisfied with slavery, and to regard anyone who tried to stir them up to make an effort for liberty as a disturber of their peace. When a man sells *himself* he is not likely to welcome any offer of freedom, and is on the way to sink lower and lower in the scale of humanity. And there are no slaves like the slaves of sin, to whom an evil desire has only to say *Do this*, and they do it; *Go*, and they go without resistance, as though the will were powerless to resist. So it was with king Ahab; naturally cowardly and selfish, he married a woman who united in herself all the worst qualities of the savage and fanatical family to whom she belonged, and who "stirred him up," as the Bible narrative tells us, to acts of violence which his feebler nature would never have attempted unaided. And so he was doubly sold, his naturally evil inclinations being all powerful as far as they went, and Jezebel prompting where his own weakness would have bidden him to stay. No marvel that any one who would undo his chains was regarded as a disturber of his peace.

1. When we do not invite God into our plans, He comes without invitation. Elijah was not included in the arrangements by which Ahab entered into possession of Naboth's vineyard; but, as God's messenger, he came nevertheless. God will assert His right to have a part in all our plans; "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths"; leave Him out, and, sooner or later, He will, by the voice of Providence and conscience, say to you, "I have found thee."

2. An intimate relationship may be the means of an immortality of infamy. "There was none like unto Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Young men and women, I beseech you to take care with whom you connect yourselves in marriage union; an ungodly person may drag you down to their level, and cause your very memory to be held in dishonour; while a godly husband or wife will lift you up to a higher standard of goodness, and make you a blessing to yourselves and others throughout eternity.

3. Divine rebuke is love in the imperative form. "I have found thee," said God to Ahab; and he was found to be reprovèd and stirred up if possible, to forsake his evil life. There is hope of any man while God rebukes him. Sometimes a ship at sea is tossing about upon the waves in the midst of a fog, around and above, the land, the sun, or stars, are all invisible. But if the compass-box is there, and the needle points to the north, there is hope even then. And so it is with a human soul; however enshrouded it may be in the darkness which is brought on by a life of wrong-doing, if God still speaks by the voice of conscience, if that inner light is not quite extinguished, if it still stings a man in the silent moments of reflection, there is hope for him yet; God has not left him to himself.

4. God's willingness to accept the least indications of repentance (vers. 27-29). Ahab's was not, we judge, a very deep or lasting repentance, it did not lead to any great change in his character. But the merciful and gracious God took account of this little evidence of sorrow, and withheld some judgment on account of it. How much more when a man turns wholly to Him, casting behind him his former rebellious life, and seeking strength to live as a new creature in Christ Jesus, when he comes with the cry, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in Thy sight," etc.

Obadiah

BY REV. CHARLES KINGSLEY, M.A.

"Obadiah feared the Lord greatly," etc.—1 Kings xviii. 3, 4.

This is the first and last time throughout the Bible, that we find this Obadiah mentioned. We find the same name elsewhere, but not the same person. It is a common Jewish name, Obadiah, and means, I believe, the servant of the Lord.

All we know of the man is contained in this chapter. We do not read what became of him afterwards. He vanishes out of the story as quickly as he came into it, and, as we go on through the chapter and read of that grand judgment at Carmel between Elijah and the priests of Baal, and the fire of God which came down from Heaven, to shew that the Lord was God, we forget Obadiah, and care to hear of him no more.

And yet Obadiah was a great man in his day. He was, it seems, king Ahab's vizier, or prime minister; the second man in the country after the king; and a prime minister in those eastern kingdoms had, and has now, far greater power than he has in a free country like this. Yes, Obadiah was a great man in his day, I doubt not; and people bowed before him when he went out, and looked up to him, in that lawless country, for life or death, for ruin or prosperity. Their money, and their land, their very lives might depend on his taking a liking toward them, or a spite against them. And he had wealth, no doubt, and his fair and great house there among the beautiful hills of Samaria, ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion, with its olive groves and vineyards, and rich gardens full of gay flowers and sweet spices, figs and peaches, and pomegranates, and all the lovely vegetation which makes those Eastern gardens like Paradise itself. And he had his great household of slaves, menservants and maid-servants, guards and footmen, singing men and singing women—perhaps a hundred souls and more eating and drinking in his house day by day for many a year. A great man; full of wealth, and pomp, and power. We know that it must have been so, because we know well in what luxury those great men in the East lived. But where is it now?

Where is it now? Vanished and forgotten. "Be not thou afraid, though one be made rich, or if the glory of his house be increased. For he shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth; neither shall his pomp follow him."

And did Obadiah, then, carry away nothing with him when he died? Yes; and yet again, No. His wealth and his power he left behind him: but one thing he took with him into the grave, better than all wealth and power; and he keeps it now, and will keep it for ever; and that is, a good, and just, and merciful action—concerning which it is written, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Yes, though a man's wealth will not follow him beyond the grave, his works will; and so Obadiah's one good deed has followed him. "He feared the Lord greatly, and when Jezebel cut off the Prophets of the Lord,

Obadiah took a hundred Prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water."

That has followed Obadiah; for by it we know him, now two thousand years and more after his death, here in a distant land of the name of which he never heard. By that good deed he lives. He lives in the pages of the Holy Bible; he lives in our minds and memories; and more than all, by that good deed he lives for ever in God's sight; he is rewarded for it, and the happier for it, doubt it not, at this very moment, and will be the happier for it for ever.

Oh blessed thought! that there is something of which death cannot rob us! That when we have to leave this pleasant world, wife and child, home and business, and all that has grown up round us here on earth, till it has become like a part of ourselves, yet still we are not destitute. We can turn round on death and say—"Though I die, yet canst thou not take my righteousness from me!" Blessed thought! that we cannot do a good deed, not even give a cup of cold water in Christ's name, but what it shall rise again, like a guardian angel, to smooth our death-bed pillow, and make our bed for us in our sickness, and follow us into the next world, to bless us for ever and ever!

And blessed thought, too, that what you do well and lovingly, for God's sake, will bless you here in this world before you die! Yes, my friends, in the dark day of sorrow and loneliness, and perplexity, you will find old good deeds, which you perhaps have forgotten, coming to look after you, as it were, and help you in the hour of need. Those whom you have helped, will help you in return: and if they will not, God will; for He is not unrighteous, to forget any work and labour of love, which you have showed for His name's sake, in ministering to His saints. So found Obadiah in that sad day, when he met Elijah.

For he was in evil case that day, as were all souls, rich and poor, throughout that hapless land. For three weary years, there had been no drop of rain: the earth beneath their feet had been like iron, and the heavens above them brass; and Obadiah had found poverty, want, and misery, come on him in the midst of all his riches: he had seen his fair gardens wither, and his olives and his vines burnt up with drought;—his cattle had perished on the hills, and his servants, too, perhaps, in his house. Perhaps his children at home were even then crying for food and water, and crying in vain, in spite of all their father's greatness.

What was the use of wealth? He could not eat gold, nor drink jewels. What was the use of his power? He could not command the smallest cloud to rise up off the sea, and pour down one drop of water to quench their thirst. Yes, Obadiah was in bitter misery that day, no doubt; and all the more, because he felt that all was God's judgment on the people's sins. They had served Baalim and Ashtaroth, the sun and moon and stars, and prayed to them for rain and fruitful seasons, as if they were the rulers of the weather and the soil, instead of serving the true God Who made Heaven and earth, and all therein: and now God had *judged* them: He had given His sentence and verdict about that matter, and told them, by a sign which could not be mistaken, that He, and not the sun and moon, was master of the sky and the sea, and the rain and the soil. They had prayed to the sun and moon; and this was the fruit of their prayers—that their prayers had not been heard: but instead of rain and plenty, was drought and barrenness;—carcases of cattle scattered over the pastures—every village full of living skeletons, too weak to work (though what use in working, when the ground would yield no crop?)—crawling about, their tongues cleaving to the roof of their mouths, in vain searching after a drop of water. Fearful and sickening sights must Obadiah have seen that day, as he rode wearily on upon his pitiful errand. And the thought of what a pitiful errand he was going on, and what a pitiful king he served, must have made him all the more miserable; for, instead of turning and repenting, and going back to the true God, which was the plain and the only way of escaping out of that misery, that wretched King Ahab seems to have cared for nothing but his horses.

We do not read that he tried to save one of his wretched people alive. All his cry was, "Go into the land, to all fountains of water and all brooks; perhaps we shall find grass enough to save the horses and mules alive: that we lose not all the beasts." The horses were what he cared for more than the human beings, as many of those bad kings of Israel did. Moses had expressly commanded them not to multiply horses to themselves; but they persisted always in doing so, nevertheless. And why? Because they wanted horses to mount their guards; to keep up a strong force of cavalry and chariots, in order to oppress the poor country people, whom they had brought down to slavery,

from having been free yeomen, as they were in the days of Moses and Joshua. And what hope could he have for his wretched country? The people shewed no signs of coming to their senses; the king still less. His wicked Queen Jezebel was as devoted as ever to her idols; the false prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty men, and the prophets of the groves (where the stars were worshipped) four hundred; and these cheats contrived (as such false teachers generally do) to take good care of themselves, and to eat at Jezebel's table, while all the rest of the people were perishing. What could be before the country, and him, too, but utter starvation, and hopeless ruin? And all this while his life was in the hands of a weak and capricious tyrant, who might murder him any moment, and of a wicked and spiteful queen, who certainly would murder him, if she found out that he had helped and saved the Prophets of the Lord. Who so miserable as he? But on that day, Obadiah found that his alms and prayers had gone up before God, and were safe with God, and not to be forgotten for ever. When he fell on his face before Elijah, in fear for his life, he found that he was safe in God's hands; that God would not betray him or forsake him. Elijah promised him, with a solemn oath, that he would keep his word with him; he kept it, and, before many days were past, Obadiah had an answer to all his prayers, and a relief from all his fears; and the Lord sent a gracious rain on His inheritance, and refreshed it when it was weary.

Yes, my friends, though well-doing seems for a while not to profit you, persevere: in due time you shall reap, if you faint not. Though the Lord sometimes waits to be gracious, He only waits, He does not forget; and it is to be *gracious* that He waits, not ungracious. Cast, therefore, thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight, for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. Do thy diligence to give of what thou hast; for so gatherest thou thyself in the day of necessity, in which, with what measure you have measured to others, God will measure to you again.

This is true, for the Scripture says so; this *must* be true, for reason and conscience—the voice of God within us—tell us that God is just; that God must be true, though every man be a liar. “Hear,” says our Lord, “what the *unjust* judge says: And shall not God (the just Judge), avenge His own elect, who cry day and night to Him, though He bear long with them?” Yes, my friends, God's promise stands sure, now and for ever. “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”

But now comes in a doubt—and it ought to come in—What are our works at best? What have we which is fit to offer to God? Full of selfishness, vanity, self-conceit, the best of them; and not half done either. What have we ever done right, but what we might have done more rightly, and done more of it, also? Bad in quality our good works are, and bad in quantity, too. How shall we have courage to carry them in our hand to that God Who charges His very Angels with folly; and the very Heavens are not clean in His sight?

Too true, if we had to offer our own works to God. But, thanks be to His holy name, we have not to offer them ourselves; for there is One Who offers them for us—Jesus Christ the Lord. He it is Who takes these imperfect, clumsy works of ours, all soiled and stained with our sin and selfishness, and washes them clean in His most precious blood, which was shed to take away the sin of the world: He it is Who, in some wonderful and unspeakable way, cleanses our works from sin, by the merit of His death and sufferings, so that nothing may be left in them but what is the fruit of God's own Spirit; and that God may see in them only the good which He Himself put into them, and not the stains and soils which they get from our foolish and sinful hearts.

Oh, my friends, bear this in mind. Whensoever you do a thing which you know to be right and good, instead of priding yourself on it, as if the good in it came from you, offer it up to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to your Heavenly Father, from Whom all good things come, and say, “Oh Lord, the good in this is Thine, and not mine; the bad in it is mine, and not Thine. I thank Thee for having made me do right, for without Thy help I should have done nothing but wrong; for mine is the laziness, and the weakness, and the selfishness, and the self-conceit; and Thine is the Kingdom, for Thou rulest all things; and the power, for Thou doest all things; and the glory, for Thou doest all things well, for ever and ever. Amen.”

Obadiah

BY RIGHT REV. JOHN JACKSON, D.D.

"Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly."—1 Kings xviii. 3.

The lesson which I wish to draw from the account we have of Obadiah is, that there is nothing in external circumstances to prevent us from being religious; that where there is a sincere purpose to serve God, we may do so in the apparently most unfavourable positions; and that, consequently, the excuses men make for their neglect of religion, or their defects in obedience, are futile in the sight of God.

It is impossible for external circumstances to be more adverse to religion than those in which Obadiah was placed. The native of a country in which the pure worship of God had been authoritatively superseded by an idolatrous perversion of it; living in a reign in which the wild and lascivious rites of a heathen deity had been introduced by the monarch, and greedily welcomed by the people; holding office in a court which had not only rejected, but persecuted the true faith, and in which, doubtless, zeal for the creed of Baal was the surest road to preferment; exposed to the jealous eye of a superstitious, unscrupulous, and vindictive queen; surrounded by all those allurements to sin which invariably accompany idolatrous rites, and were a main feature in the idolatry of the Zidonians—Obadiah yet feared the Lord from his youth, and still feared Him greatly in maturer age. Who, then, shall dare to say that circumstances can render religion impossible?

Nor, indeed, can such an excuse ever be admitted, if we consider whence true religion really proceeds. If it were the natural growth of our own heart; if temptations were to be overcome only in our own strength; if faith, and love, and obedience were the product of our own resolutions and the result of our own efforts; it might well be, that the situation in which we were placed, and the influences by which we were surrounded, might be too strong for our powers of resistance, and might frustrate our best intentions in the service of God, as they often do our wisest schemes for the attainment of the objects of this life. But a fundamental lesson of Christianity is our inability to do any thing good of ourselves, and the sufficiency of God. From Him proceeds the beginning, the growth, and the perfection of religion in the soul.

Now it can never be pretended that the almighty grace of God is limited by outward conditions, or bound and cramped by external circumstances. It cannot be that there are temptations too strong for God, and influences which He is unable to dissipate, or even to make work together for good. There is no state so beset with temptations, no condition so fraught with peril to the soul, no place so desolate of opportunities and means of grace, where the Omnipresent Spirit comes not. And where He is, He is Omnipotent, and can say to the faint or tempted soul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

But further; we have an infallible assurance that our trials shall in no case exceed our strength, but shall admit, if we will, with God's help, of successful resistance. "There hath no temptation taken you," writes St. Paul, "but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." "Resist the devil," teaches St. James, "and he will flee from you." And St. Peter, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." God, indeed, is in no sense the Author of our temptations to evil, though He permits them. And He permits them, not for our destruction, but for our probation. But were they irresistible, were they so strong, and the circumstances in which we are placed so inevitably productive of sin, that they became our justification, and we ceased to be responsible for yielding,—they would be trials no longer. They would be the providence of a Holy God thrusting His creatures into sin—a supposition as absurd as it is impious. The real force and danger of temptation is within; external things are but the occasions and objects, harmless but for the passions and appetites within the breast. But within also is, or may be, the grace of God, almighty to direct, control and purify, and pledged by His own unerring word to make a way for us, and enable us to escape sin. And thus, by virtue of God's promise, every temptation becomes, not an excuse, but a trial; transmuted to a blessing, if we endure it faithfully; but if we yield, involving us in a righteous condemnation.

And, lastly, we have reason to believe that God proportions His grace to our need; so that the difficulties of our position, and the temptations by which we are surrounded, may even open new sources of comfort, and strengthen the soul they seem to endanger. Such was the history of one of St. Paul's trials. "Lest I should be exalted above measure," he tells the Corinthians, "through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." And as in afflictions, the soul never feels God so near, as when it has gently rested its will on His, prepared to suffer whatever may seem good to Him, and "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience" of His love: so in temptations, the hour of the greatest trial is often the hour of the greatest strength. The soul, scared from self-confidence and the presumption which makes us all so weak, clings closer to the Cross. God is sought; and because sought, found. The earnest player is answered by the gift of "grace to help in time of need"; and the promise is made good to the tried and tempted spirit, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." And we can scarcely doubt, that Obadiah, in an idolatrous and dissolute court, when he retired in secret to lift up his vexed soul to the God of his fathers, even when the cymbals of Baal were ringing in his ears, and his very life hung on the capricious will of a tyrant, found a calm, and comfort, and inward strength, a fuller consciousness of the presence and smile of Jehovah, than he might have done if worshipping in safety in the courts of Sion, and going with the multitude to the very house of God.

It follows, then, that the circumstances in which we are placed—not by blind chance, remember, but by the providence of God—can never furnish a valid excuse for our want of religion; not even when those circumstances do appear to place us in a disadvantageous position with respect to the means of grace and the performance of our duty.

1. No excuse is urged more often for neglect of religion than the pressure of occupation, and consequent want of time. In all ranks of life, but especially by the professional man, the tradesman, the artisan, and the labourer, we hear this pretext alleged. Men admit the duty; they think that it should be performed by others; they hope some day to perform it themselves. At present, they have not the time. The circumstances in which they are placed oblige them to give all their attention to their occupations; and even the Sunday, after the fatigue and excitement of a busy week, they require as a day of rest. Now supposing all this to be the fact, what would be the natural conduct of men who believe that they are to live throughout eternity, and that the character of that eternity depends upon what they do now? Would it not be to moderate, at all risks, the eagerness with which they pursue their worldly calling, and to *make* time for religion? But, in fact, it is rarely that those who have no time for religion, have no time for pleasure. They can indulge self, though they cannot serve God; and thus their own conduct shatters their own excuses to pieces. But, indeed, the whole pretext is founded on a misconception of the nature of religion. It takes it for granted that our worldly calling is one thing, and God's service another; whereas we are to serve God *in* our worldly calling, and to turn our commonest occupations to religion, by doing them as well as we can for His sake, and as in His sight. "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do," is the Christian's rule, "do all to the glory of God." No; it is but an excuse, and an empty one, that we have no time for religion. Be in earnest; think what your soul is worth; what you owe to God; what your Redeemer has done for you. Live in the light of these all-important truths, each one of which far outweighs all your worldly interests and hopes; and you will soon find that those occupations and duties which you now plead as obstacles to religion, are, in fact, the scene and opportunities in which religion is to be exercised, God served, your soul saved.

2. Beside this pretext of the want of time, there is a general tendency in every age and condition of life, to consider the circumstances of each condition and age, when present, to be peculiarly unfavourable to religion, and on this plea to palliate carelessness and sin, or to postpone earnestness, self-denial, and efforts to love and serve God, to some "more convenient season." The young have quick imaginations, strong passions, feeble wills, and much time before them: religion will be easier in advancing years. In middle age, the cares of life, the habits, practices, or requirements of their trade or profession, or the tone of the society in which they are obliged to move, render it impossible, men

say, to maintain a spiritual mind, or to be as religious as they hope to be hereafter. The old plead, with melancholy truth, the rigidity of long-formed habits, the growing dulness of their faculties, and their increasing incapacity for exertion. The poor are occupied with toil, and harassed with anxiety, and thrown by want into the midst of strong temptations. The rich are compelled to live up to their station, and to comply with much which their conscience condemns; but surrounded, as they are, by allurements to self-gratification, and with the means of indulgence ready to their hands, it can hardly be but that they will sometimes transgress. While even in that middle rank, whose happy mediocrity was the wise prayer of Agur the son of Jakeh, there are those who find a plea for worldliness in their anxieties and their opportunities alike: they have cares unknown to the rich; they have temptations forbidden to the poor. It would seem, then, to result from all these various excuses, either that true religion is impossible, or nearly so, in every age and every station of life, and that the all-wise God has made requirements of us which the great bulk of mankind is unable to perform; or (which is, of course, the truth) that such excuses are groundless,—the pretences of a rebellious will, or the poor subterfuges of self-deceit. Every rank and age has, doubtless, its peculiar difficulties and dangers, differing in kind in each, but nearly the same, probably, in degree in all. These are, in fact, the trials which, in his various positions and the successive stages of his existence on earth, constitute man's probation. These are the enemies from whose attacks no Christian can be exempt, and in repelling and overcoming which he is to win his crown. These are the temptations which are skilfully adapted, no doubt, by the guile of the great adversary to the circumstances of each, but are in no case permitted to be beyond the strength which each may have if he will, are in no case a justification of sin, or of resting contentedly below the standard of duty which the Gospel requires. "There hath no temptation taken you," is the assurance of God's Word to each, "but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear-it."

3. A yet more self-condemning excuse it is, when men urge the many trials they have had, as the reason why they have not attended to religion as they ought. If there be one special end which our Heavenly Father has in view, in suffering us to be afflicted, it is to bring us to Him. "He chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." Pain, sickness, sorrow, poverty, bereavement, have all alike the same office, to wear our hearts from the world, and to fix them upon God. And the experience of all ages has found suffering the mother of godliness. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," said the Psalmist, expressing the thankful retrospect of many a sorrowing soul; "but now have I kept Thy Word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." If, then, your trials, as they may have done, have kept you from God, instead of bringing you to Him; if you have brooded over them in sullen discontent, and let anxiety and care occupy and distract your heart; recollect that you have yourselves turned to your bane, what was sent for your good; that you have poisoned your medicines; and that the very excuse you pretend for the neglect of God, is the very reason why you should have learnt to serve Him.

4. Another plea sometimes alleged, if not for neglect of religion, at least for a low standard of devotion and obedience, is the want of a faithful ministry. This, indeed, is often a most groundless excuse, and is sometimes made where it has the least warrant; but let us take it were circumstances may seem unhappily to give it force. If we lived in other parishes, it is said, and had the advantages which others have, we should doubtless be better than we are. Now, I am not undervaluing the assistance we may receive from a pastor who rightly divides the Word of truth, and whose life illustrates what he teaches. But after all, the efficacy of the Word depends, far more upon the candour and faith of those who hear, and above all, on the blessing of God's Holy Spirit; and where these are, the coldest and most imperfect teaching may do more to train, and warm, and elevate the soul, than the words of Apollos or of Paul falling on an unwilling heart. But further, how do you know that the ministry where Providence has cast your lot, is an unfaithful ministry? Is it by comparing what you hear with the Holy Scriptures, and missing the mighty truths, the gracious promises, the spiritual holiness, which God's Word supplies? Then why do you not go more frequently to that well-spring of all good, and drink deep there of the water of life?

5. It is a more plausible excuse, when it is pleaded that our relations and friends are opposed to religion, and that we cannot lead a consistently Christian life without

being exposed to their displeasure, cold looks, and perhaps ridicule. Now, doubtless, it is difficult to be religious under such circumstances, but it is not impossible. It was very difficult for Obadiah to serve God in Ahab's court; yet "he feared the Lord greatly." And it is not difficulty, but only impossibility, which will excuse the breach of a commandment. The temptation before us our Lord has solemnly warned us against, when He said, "If any man come to Me, and hate not (i.e., love Me not better than) his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Nor are such painful circumstances without their peculiar comfort and encouragement. Not only is the reward proportioned to the difficulty, and the brightness of the crown to the severity of the struggle, so that "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for Christ's name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life"; but there is the happy hope, that gentle, unobtrusive perseverance in a consistent life of holiness, may gain over to the Gospel those who oppose it now, and may save souls dear to us almost as our own.

6. I will mention but one more very common, but very unjustifiable, excuse: our tempers and passions are so strong that we cannot resist them, and it can be no wonder if, constituted as we are, we are at times hurried into sin. This is, in fact, to make God, Who implanted those passions, the Author of evil, and to accuse Him of obliging us to do wrong. We have spoken of this before. But let me ask those who thus dare to shelter their sins behind their Creator, whether they have ever fairly tried to master their passions, in the only way in which success can be hoped. It is quite true that the passions and tempers of some men are too strong to be restrained by any motives of their own,—interest or prudence, shame or fear. But it is not true that they are too strong to be restrained by the omnipotence of God's grace, by prayer and faith, and the love of Christ constraining us. Have you tried this? Have you made your resolutions, humbly yet firmly, in dependence on Divine help? Have you sought God's Spirit in fervent, frequent prayer? Have you used diligently all the means of grace? Have you endeavoured to recollect what you are—the creature of God's hand, the purchase of Christ's blood, a member of His body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, a citizen of Heaven: and with this ennobling faith, have you watched over yourselves and against temptation, checking the first impulse of the roused passions, and stifling the first thoughts of evil, unweariedly, though sadly, rising from a fall to renew the contest, and resolved to take up your cross and follow Jesus, purifying yourself even as He is pure? But if not, what right have you to plead the strength of passions which you have not tried in earnest to cope with? You must not excuse yourself by a slavery which is a voluntary slavery. O rather come to Christ, that "the Son may make you free." "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness"; that, "being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye may have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

Elijah

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"Elijah the Tishbite."—1 Kings xvii. 1.

The rise at all critical times of the world's history, of men eminently suited for the work they have to do, is a result, and therefore a proof, of the two great truths—(1) That whilst the race of men, like other races of animals, is physically subject to the ordinary law of inherited life, yet that every soul is a separate creation, gifted, apart from all others, with its destined individuality; (2) That the whole race is subject to a continually-acting superintending Providence. The world's history shows that the man the age needed has continually been given to the age. Nowhere is this more distinctly traceable than in the life of the great Prophet Elijah.

Sixty-five years had passed since the ten tribes had revolted from the house of David, and Jeroboam had mounted the vacant throne and reigned over them "according to all that his soul desired." Chequered years they had been: marked on the whole by much temporal prosperity, but clouded ever deeper and deeper with the dark shadows of spiritual evil. Jeroboam's reign began with all the vigour of a new dynasty; but ended

in loss, disgrace, and timely death. Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, though he "walked in all the sins of his father which he had done before him," and though "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God," was yet as to power of mind and personal prowess a very different man from the feeble, boasting Rehoboam. He "set his battle in array with an army of valiant men of war"; he routed the force of the ten tribes. He "waxed mighty"; and he was wise in discourse as well as strong of arm; for "his ways and his sayings" were "written in the story of the Prophet Iddo." He was the scourge of the usurper through all Jeroboam's later days. "Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the Lord struck him, and he died" (2 Chron. xiii. 20). The short reign of his son Nadab reached to but two uneventful years; that of Baasha, the son of Ahijah, who succeeded to the throne of the master against whom he had conspired, and whom he had smitten, lasted for twenty-four years, and was, through his "might," a time of military glory for the ten tribes. Baasha's provocations of the God Who had "exalted him out of the dust, and made him a prince over Israel," brought extermination on his house and his supporters. His son was murdered after a feeble two years' reign, and the throne given by the army to Omri, the captain of the host. During his twelve years' reign, Omri bought the far-famed hill of Shemer, and built on it the city of Samaria; setting up there the throne of his dynasty. There his son Ahab reigned after him for two-and-twenty years.

Ahab was what the world would call a great king. Magnificence reigned throughout his days in Samaria; art was encouraged, and the increasing population better and more safely housed. He was, too, successful in war, as well as great in the arts of peace. Twice he overthrew signally the forces of Benhadad; and recovered the cities which the forces of Syria had taken from his warlike predecessor, Baasha; and he fell as other brave men have fallen, in battle, heading an aggressive and invading army against the enemies of Israel.

But this worldly success was accompanied by an amount of wickedness unknown before even to the evil kings of the separated tribes. (1 Kings xvi. 30—33). His introduction of the worship of Baal was a new and separate kind of sin from the iniquity of Jeroboam. His golden calves, abominable as they were, had themselves been intended to signify to a sensuous generation a local and special presence of their fathers' God. They were the instruments of a forbidden mode of worshipping Him; but still they were meant for His worship. What the temple at Jerusalem, with its altars, and its courts, and its sacrifice, was to the two tribes as God's special resting place, that the golden calves of Bethel and of Dan, with their adapted ritual and their imitated priesthood, were to be to the ten. But to worship Baal was to introduce not only new rites, but a new god; to provoke Jehovah, not only by drawing nigh to Him with a self-invented and forbidden ritual, but audaciously to set up against Him another god. In Baal and in Ashtoreth, the great Phœnician male and female deities, were gathered up for the more polished tribes surrounding Israel the worship of the heathendom. Baal was, under different forms and appellations, the god of natural power, the god of light, the god of increase. Ashtoreth was the female corresponding deity. In many of these temples, in that of Baal-Peor especially, and generally in those of Ashtoreth, the rites of worship were defiled by the wildest sensual license; and all that could pollute and degrade humanity was practised in honour of these devil gods. It was this which Ahab had imported into Israel.

Nor was the establishment of this hideous worship all his sin. The Zidonian sharer of his bed and of his throne, whose very presence was a crime against the God of Israel, was not only zealous for the heathen god whose name her father bore, but, as a true daughter of Eth-Baal, was fierce against the rival honour of Jehovah. In her, as in other women of her class, under the painted cheek and tired head there lay concealed the cruel soul of the murderess; she "cut off" the Prophets of the Lord, and would have destroyed them all if the courage of one who "feared the Lord greatly" had not, at the risk of his own life, hid the remnant in unsuspected caves, and fed them there with bread and water till the bloody days were passed.

In the full darkness of these evil days, the bright light of Elijah's prophetic ministry breaks upon us in the sacred record with the startling suddenness of a meteor's blaze in the blackness of the night. At his first appearing, he is the stern threatener of judgment on the wicked king in the very height of his prosperity. He "said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." And the judgment announced, the Prophet dis-

appeared. It is like the flash of the lightning, sharp as a blazing sword in its sudden vividness; but not tarrying for a moment; revealing every thing, and gone as it reveals it. This first message is a sample of his whole ministry. To him was committed a dispensation of severity and judgment. All his meetings with the king bear the same impress. When the threatened judgment had run its course, and God's command to him is, "Go, show thyself unto Ahab," even in releasing the kingdom from its plague there is the same tone of severe rebuke. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" asks the king, with the peremptory challenge of one used, even in receiving favours, "to an absolute submission." The Prophet who stands before the Lord answers him in words which must have broken with a strange ruggedness upon ears used only to courtly flattery, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house."

Again the Prophet and the monarch meet; and again it is with the suddenness, and almost with the crash of the thunder-bolt, that the presence of the man of God breaks upon the king's sight. Ahab had just triumphed signally in his wickedness. The obstinacy of Naboth had been overcome by his murder, and the king's heaviness of heart at being refused the vineyard which he coveted had been washed away in the blood of his liegeman. He rises up to take possession: he enters the longed-for fields: it is his own: his heart swells with the triumph. But what is that dark, threatening form, almost like the dead man's spirit? whose that voice heard before, and once heard never to be forgotten? The proud countenance of the earth king drops before the higher majesty. "Thus saith the Lord," is the terrible utterance, "Hast thou killed and also taken possession? In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." Ahab's answer, which comes back almost like the stifled growl of a crouching beast of prey, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" only wakes up again the severe and unalterable sentence, "I have found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and make thy house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked Me to anger, and made Israel to sin; and the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." For the time even that proud heart was humbled by the awfulness of the message, and the terrible severity of the messenger. And so they parted to meet no more.

Once again we read of the man of God standing in the presence of a king of Israel: and still it is with a like burden of threatening and of woe. Ahaziah had mounted his father's throne; and with his father's crown inherited his father's sins. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother." He falls down through a lattice, and, suffering from consequent illness, sends to Baal Ekron to inquire concerning the issue of his sickness. God intercepts the message, and sends to answer it the man who was his father's terror.

The messengers return, not with the flattering ambiguities with which, oracle-like, we may suppose that the priests of Baal would have allayed the fears and kindled the hopes of the heir of him who had made the worship of their god the religion of his court and people, but as men overawed and forced against their will to do the bidding of a mightier than themselves. They return with the strange tidings of their being met by one before whose imperious voice even the king's message had died in their mouths; by "a man who said unto us, Go turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die" (2 Kings i. 6). Hereditary impulses of hatred and terror seize on the diseased king, and he asks eagerly of the messenger the lineaments of this daring interrupter of the royal embassy. The reply, that he was "a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," is answer enough. It may well be that the Zidonian queen had stamped upon the imagination of her son those detested features; it may be that his words of doom, which waited twelve years for their accomplishment, kept alive within her breast a deadly hatred for their utterer. For three, perhaps four, years he had vanished from sight. Perchance he was dead; perhaps hidden amongst the mountains of Gilead, or buried in the caverns of Horeb. And now again, with a suddenness startling as of old, he stood beside them, again denouncing evil on the seed of Ahab. This time, at least, he shall not escape; and the captain of fifty with his fifty is sent to secure the lonely wanderer. The very number speaks the awe with which his wild strength and terrible vigour had impressed the court; and as it

seems not in vain : for on the captain of fifty and his fifty, and on a second like company, the destroying fire falls from Heaven. The third messenger, in humble guise, implores for himself and for his men mercy of the man of God, and is spared ; and with them, on God's bidding, free and fearless, the Prophet of the wilderness strides into the king's chamber, speaks again his sentence of dismay, and leaves it at his own will unfettered and unharmed.

There was no other meeting between the man of God and the house of Ahab : though, just before, or at this time, Jehoram, king of Judah, who had married Ahab's daughter and learned the customs of that evil house, received his fearful sentence in a " writing " couched in the stern sentences of the Prophet of Gilead, " With a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods " (2 Chron. xxi. 14).

Nor is it only with the royal house that the ministry of Elijah is thus marked as a dispensation of vengeance. By the priests of Jehovah's rival in His people's worship he is known as an unsparing avenger.

There is no dramatic record sublimer in its grand simplicity than the meeting of Israel and Elijah on the Mount Carmel. The World-God of nature and of strength is challenged before the assembled people to a trial with Jehovah. On Baal's side are the majesty of the crowned king, with his guards, his chariots, and his horses ; the proud display of Jezebel's court and following, ready to maintain the cause of the heathen queen ; her four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and her four hundred of Ashtoreth, with all their pomp of dress and elaborate ritual and innumerable victims and intensity of sensual devotion. Around them are the multitude of the people, the gathering of all Israel in ranks upon the mountain-side, watching with eager curiosity for that which is for ever to decide their halting opinion. In the midst of these cohorts of world prophets—gazed on with fear by the excited crowd, alone, silent, unmoved, obscure, like the dark mountain brow, wreathed with the thunder cloud—stands the Prophet of Jehovah, with his rough and scanty clothing, his massive limbs, his untrimmed hair, as though witnessing for, and communing with, the invisible God, before Whom their fathers had bowed. Throughout all the laborious preparations of the Baal prophets he is sternly silent, until he breaks in with awful irony upon their ineffectual incantations. And then when his turn is come, deliberately, and with careful accuracy, he builds up, as though with parabolic significance of what he knew to be his mission, Jehovah's long-ruined altar, and then that deep voice is heard by every ear, whilst it shakes every conscience, commercing with the Almighty. The fire of Heaven attests its servant's truth ; and with unsparing hand the Prophet of the dispensation of severity himself, as it seems, puts to death the whole licentious crew who served in the polluted temples of Baal and of Ashtoreth.

But though Elijah's ministry was one of terror and severity, and though the aspect, garb, and habits of the Prophet were all moulded into fitness for this special call, we shall altogether err if we picture him to ourselves as nothing more than a rock of the wilderness—a hard and obdurate avenger of iniquity. Such never are Jehovah's witnesses. Such never can, whatever terror they may strike, reach down into the depths of a nation's heart. It is in the union of these dark lineaments of massive strength and awful severity, with all the tenderness of a human heart, that the power of such a character consists.

And these are eminently combined in Elijah. What can be more touching than the almost woman's cry which breaks from that great soul over the dead son of the widow of Zarephath ?

How, again, does the same inner human heart reveal itself when he is driven of the Spirit into the wilderness of Sinai ; when he sits down under the juniper tree and requests that he may die ; when, the triumphs of Mount Carmel accomplished, the majesty of Jehovah avenged, the repentance of the people awakened, when he, the doer of these mighty works, finds out that he is not better than his fathers, cries for release from the long-borne burden of his loneliness—" I, even I, only am left ! " What a relief it is, as we gaze on the stern rugged features of his giant daring, to see melt like the mists of the rising sun over the rock of the wilderness this haze of human gentleness around the otherwise almost Titanic features of his greatness !

It was doubtless by this matchless combination of the sternness of his prophetic dispensation with the inner tenderness of his spirit, that the wisdom of God fitted him for his peculiar work amongst the separated tribes. For that ministry he was moulded in

the form of strength which stands before us at every turn of his mission; for that he was trained in the rocky mountain heights of his native Gilead; for that the rough sheep-skin mantle and the rude leathern girdle were the fittest dress; for that the long Nazirite locks of this (as the original has it) Lord of Hair hung down on his broad shoulders; for that this mighty solitary spirit was taught to know a woman's clinging grasp and her heart-broken cry for sympathy and fellowship; for that in all the majesty of his strength he was lured into the silence of the desert and taught by the hurricane, the lightning, and the earthquake, that not in might, but in weakness; not in action, but in waiting; not in the battle cry or the shout of victory, but in the still small voice of childlike submission was manifest, the power, the presence, and the greatness of Jehovah.

This, then, is the echo of Elijah's voice: Cast away the present sin, purify the system in which thou art from Baal and from Ashtoreth, from world worship, sensuality, and pride. Fall thou on this thy Carmel upon thy face, and let thy soul cry out, "The Lord, He is the God! The Lord, He is the God!" and thy spirit's drought shall leave thee, showers of grace refresh thee, Heaven be open to thee. Live in this present life with God, and He, when it is His will, in His own time, will lead thee in other paths which thou knowest not, and set before thee, when thou hast been fitted to dwell within them, larger rooms of more perfect service.

Elijah

BY REV. JOSEPH CROSS, D.D.

"My father, my father! the chariot of Israel," etc.—2 Kings ii. 12.

Who can estimate the benefit to others of a good man's life? But when that man is a Prophet, inspired of the Holy Ghost, and endowed with miraculous powers, it is as if God Himself, laying aside something of His glory, walked and worked among us. Truly is such a one the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the ambassador plenipotent of Jehovah in a rebellious province of His empire. A few references to the history of Elijah will justify the estimate.

The Prophet's name is significant, indicating the faith of the father who gave it, or the son who assumed it, in "Jehovah the Mighty God." Here lay Elijah's strength, and hence his zeal, his energy, and his grand success. Born, most likely, of a poor Israelitish family, and bred in an obscure mountain village of Gilead, amidst the polytheistic abominations of the Amorites, his was not the glory of ancestral renown, the phosphorescent light emitted by dead men's bones, nor the advantage of superior educational environments. Doubtless he possessed an original greatness of soul, and his natural endowments were sanctified by his supreme devotion to God. But his power was a supernatural, Divine investiture, enabling him to work wonders worthy of an Almighty hand, commanding the winds and the clouds, shutting and opening Heaven, creating food for the famishing, breathing life into the dead, making kings quake upon their thrones, wielding the lightnings against his foes, sweeping the land of its idolatries, changing the religion of a nation in a day, cutting off the flow of the Jordan with a stroke of his mantle, and then ascending to God without passing through the valley of the shadow of death.

Translated, Tishbite means Converter. To whom could such a title be more applicable than to Elijah? Like a new star of unprecedented brilliancy suddenly lighted up in Heaven, he came in one of the darkest periods of Jewish history. The kingdom was divided, and the two factions were in deadly feud. The throne of Israel was occupied by the impious Ahab, and a Sidonian idolatress sat at his side. On every hill smoked the altars of Baal, while every valley flowed with libations of human blood, and the servants of Jehovah were persecuted off the face of the earth. At such a time stood forth the Prophet like an Angel of God. His very first announcement fell like a thunderbolt upon the throne: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Who is this, that threatens to bind the sweet influences of nature, and seal up the fountains of the sky? Do not the hills of Samaria shake their green heads at the oath, and the purple vineyards blush for the audacity of the Prophet; while the rivers smile along the valleys at the prediction, and the leaping cascades laugh the vain menace to scorn? Nay, but

the word is God's; and in a few months the heavens are brass, and the earth is iron. The curse has stuck into the soil, and every green thing withers, and the beasts moan along the dusty beds of former streams and all life lies languishing in the oppressive heat. Everywhere the indignant monarch seeks the Prophet, but he has fled to the wilderness, for what has he to expect from hands red with the blood of his brethren? More than three years has the drought prevailed, and the famine is sore in the land. Ahab is out searching for water, and God commands His servant to go and meet him. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" roughly demands the king. How answers Elijah? With excuses, pleas for mercy, promises of rain, and smooth prophecies of peace? Is he the man to tremble at the roaring of the lion, to quail before the sceptred slave of an idolatress, to avert personal danger by artifice, or appease an angry tyrant by flattery? Hark! "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." Brave, heroic man! preferring truth to liberty, and fidelity to life, for the reformation of an apostate prince, the disenchantment of his deluded subjects, and the deliverance of the land from its idolatries! Is he not indeed "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof"?

Now we shall witness one of the sublimest triumphs ever achieved by a Prophet. By this worm God will thresh the mountains. In one day the land shall be purged of its heathen abominations, and all Israel recalled to the worship of Jehovah. A single Prophet of the Lord against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred of Ashtoreth, he demands the gathering of all Israel to him in Mount Carmel. It is done, for Elijah is the king now, and Ahab dares not disobey his orders. The Prophet is speaking to the Concourse: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him; if Baal, follow him." They answer him not a word; so Elijah will answer himself; God, rather, will answer for all. The test is instituted; two bullocks are furnished for sacrifice; the priests of Baal have the first choice of the victims, and the first opportunity of trying the power of their deity. Every advantage allowed them, they prepare their offering, they pray, they plead, they shout, they leap upon the altar, they cut themselves with knives and lancets, while Elijah's bitter irony intensifies their frenzy, but there is no answer from Heaven or hell, and the effort is abandoned in despair. Now the Prophet of Jehovah builds his altar and lays his sacrifice in order upon the wood; four barrels of water, thrice repeated, are poured over it, saturating the fuel and filling the trench; when, with calm dignity, the holy man calls upon the Lord to plead His own cause. Lo, the fire! the fire from Heaven! Falling upon their faces, the people shout: "The Lord, He is the God! the Lord, He is the God!" Now is thy time, Elijah! Seize the vile impostors! Let not one escape! The people hardly need his instigation. In fury they fall upon their deceivers, drag them down to the brook Kishon, and instantly put them to the sword. Now will God be gracious to the land, purged of its idolatry. Now the brazen heavens shall melt in teeming showers over the iron earth. "Get thee up, Ahab! eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain!" But while the monarch banquets in his pavilion the man of God is bowed in prayer upon the mountain. Six times he sends his servant to look toward the sea; six times the servant returns with no cheering tidings. He sends the seventh time, continuing his supplication. A little cloud, rising from the Mediterranean, spreads rapidly over the heavens, and the mountain forest roars with the voice of the coming blessing. Fatigued and exhausted as he must be with the labours of the day, Elijah girds up his loins, and outruns the swift steeds of the king, sixteen miles or more, to the entrance of Jezreel. Behold the triumph of faith and righteousness: "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"

Time would fail me to tell of all the other recorded instances of the Prophet's heroic faith and courage—his miraculous sustenance by the brook Cherith, his wonderful works of charity at Zarephath, his flight from the vengeance of the infuriated queen, the solitary meal which sustained him forty days in his journey to Horeb, the revelation which he received in one of the caverns of the Mount of God, the call of Elisha to the succession of his prophetic office, the curse pronounced upon Ahab in the vineyard of the murdered Naboth, the denunciation and untimely death of the wicked Ahaziah, the fire of Heaven called down upon the two captains and their fifties, the letter written to Jehoram King of Judah, the wretched Jezebel trampled by horses and devoured by dogs in the gate of Jezreel, the long series of judgments which drenched the sanguinary

royal house with blood, and avenged Samaria of her seducers and oppressors—all which justify Elisha's estimate of Elijah. But I must not omit to mention the schools of the Prophets which he founded and superintended, in which young men were instructed in Divine truth, educated in the fear of the Lord, fortified against the seductions of idolatry, prepared to expose the specious arts of religious imposture, and bear effectual witness against the wickedness of the times. Such institutions must have exerted a powerful conservative influence upon the faith, worship, and morality of the people. Beacons were they amidst the darkness, and fountains of living water in the desert. Thus their father became a mightier defence and more efficient help to his nation than all her marshalled hosts, with all their engines of war. In short, Elijah solemnly joined hands with Jehovah against the workers of iniquity, and his life was a perpetual effort to reform and save his people, to throw barriers athwart their path to ruin, "to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." This is the true vocation of the Prophet, and here is real grandeur of character. What, in comparison, are all the achievements of art or of arms? His name shall outlive those of your Homers, Platos, Tullys, Cæsars, Napoleons, as long as Jehovah's reign shall survive the empires of the world. Unsung by the poet, unpraised by the orator, unchronicled by the historian, it lives in the archives of Immanuel's Kingdom, while the mausoleum moulders, and the sarcophagus decays, and the pyramids sink in the sand, and worn-out worlds disappear from the sky, to be read by the light of the last conflagration, and proclaimed amid the trumpeting of the first resurrection—"the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"

The pilgrim approaches the end of his journey. The stormy day is about to close in a tranquil evening, tinged with the golden light of a better world. Nothing remains but a parting word and paternal benediction to the several schools of the Prophets. Elijah seems conscious of his approaching change. God has indicated to him His purpose to take to Himself in a singular and most honourable manner, wonderfully rewarding his fidelity, demonstrating the truth of his religion, giving mankind a sensible demonstration of immortality, and furnishing the world an illustrious type of the Resurrection and Ascension of its Redeemer. Nor is the Divine purpose wholly unknown to Elisha. Either God has revealed it to him, or Elijah has given him the information. The faithful servant sees the gleam of the coming chariot, and cleaves more earnestly than ever to his beloved father. Desiring to be alone with God, Elijah would have him tarry at Gilgal, while he himself goes to Bethel; but Elisha replies: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Arrived at Bethel, Elijah desires him to remain there, but he makes the same answer. At Jericho the request is again renewed, and the vow again repeated. The loving disciple can not be prevailed upon to leave the dear master he is so soon to lose. The sons of the Prophets, too, anticipate their father's removal. At Bethel they ask Elisha: "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" "Yea, I know it," he replies; "hold ye your peace." The same question is addressed to him at Jericho, with the same result. Not a word upon the subject is Elisha willing to hear, except from Elijah himself. It is too awful and too holy for any tongue but his. Silently and tremblingly he clings to the blessed saint with whom have been spent the happiest hours he ever knew. He will accompany him as near the gate of Heaven as he may go. In love Elijah yields to his resolution, and side by side they journey on to the Jordan. Standing upon the brink of the river, the Prophet folds his mantle together, and with it smites the waters. Hither and thither they are parted, affording the pilgrims a dry passage. And still talking together they go forward, climbing the hills of Gilead. What they are saying none but the Angels know; yet it is easy to imagine something of the solemn earnestness and holy tenderness of that last conversation. How calmly the Prophet speaks of his coming rapture! how humbly mentions his unworthiness of the honour! how sadly dwells on the degeneracy of the chosen people! how anxiously forewarns his friend of the fiery trials that await him! how joyfully decants on the Divine promises and the eternal reward! And with what reverent love and meek submission Elisha answers! what sorrow for the approaching separation! what confidence of the subsequent reunion! what humility in every tone and accent! what unfaltering trust in the living God! what repeated pledges of fidelity unto death! what heroic fortitude! what high resolve! what courage! and what hope! And as they thus go on talking, lo! a chariot of fire, with horses of fire, rushes in between them, and Elijah ascends by a whirlwind into Heaven. And Elisha, beholding, cries: "My father, my father! the chariot of

Israel, and the horsemen thereof!"

Thus ended Elijah's labours, but not his life. He still lived, but he lived with God. Too pure for human companionship, he was transferred to the fellowship of Angels. No longer could he be allowed to remain in a world so unworthy of his presence, and so incapable of appreciating his services. His sojourn here had been a scene of constant disquietude and peril, and God removed him to a place of eternal tranquility and security. Not like others had he lived on earth; not like others was he called away. Exempted from the common sentence of mortality, he was taken up bodily into Heaven. To fit it for its new residence and relations, his physical system, suddenly and without pain, experienced a mighty change, equivalent to both death and resurrection, or the instantaneous transformation of the living saints at the sound of the last trump. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the chrysalis developed the psyche, the corruptible put on incorruption, and the favourite of Heaven left the vale of tears and scaled the mount of God.

Elijah

BY REV. ALFRED CLEGG.

"If the Lord be God, follow Him," etc.—1 Kings xviii. 21.

Biography is the best teacher of the human heart, for it is a double mirror,—reflecting the character portrayed, and revealing us to ourselves. We can trace through no life (however different from our own in spirit and circumstance) without finding some elements in it which illuminate and blend with our life. So the characters outlined in the Bible, are not only those of men and women who lived some thousands of years ago, but those, too, who are in this church to-night. The mantle of an Elijah may be resting upon some shoulder before me now.

I. THE CONDITION OF THE NATION.

The Jewish people were split into two antagonistic sections,—those who inhabited the northern part of Palestine, which was called the land of Israel; those who inhabited the southern portion, which was called the land of Judah. Under King Asa, the land of Judah had revived its worship of Jehovah, but the Israelites had sunk into base idolatry. So much so, that when Ahab came to the throne, he first married a Phœnician woman—Jezebel, and then (under her wicked influence) threw over Jehovah-worship, and set up calf-worship, and the worship of Baal. The Prophets of Jehovah were silenced by murder, the temples of Jehovah were desecrated, the name of Jehovah was ridiculed, or whispered only in dread.

II. THE ADVENT OF ELIJAH.

Suddenly, across this plain of fear, degradation and death, a figure sweeps. Into the very court of the palace a voice of thunder crashes upon its idolatry, sensualism, and indulgent ease. Startling in its suddenness, terrible in its tones, awful in its prophecy.

From the solitary hills of Gilead, the unknown figure comes,—in no courtly dress, but with the leathern girdle of the desert, and wild, black hair, and rugged countenance, and fearless spirit. He had watched the degeneration of his countrymen with bleeding heart. He had watched, with boiling indignation, the holy and only God (Jehovah) mocked and dishonoured. And now Jehovah had called him from strong feeling to strong action,—had commanded Elijah the Tishbite to be the Divine Voice of condemnation and coming catastrophe to the wicked court and idolatrous country; had commanded him to destroy the reign of Baal, and set up once more Israel's Jehovah; had commanded him to become the stern, outer conscience to the guilty king and queen, and priests of Baal. There, before the vacillating king, and vindictive queen, and false priests, stood the lonely man of God,—the only voice that dare raise itself against wrong: "Because of your sin, God shall smite you with famine." Brief, incisive words. Here, surely, is a new force in the land,—a dauntless reformer, who will make a throne to tremble. So, with his prophetic utterance, he shot like a meteor into the darkened air of Israel's national and religious life.

The famine came. Ahab accused Elijah of being the evil cause of it. "No," thundered Elijah, "it is you. You have forsaken Jehovah, and given yourself and your people up to the worship of Baal, and God has punished you by this famine, that you and Israel might turn again to Him in repentance." Ahab would not believe. He stood by Baal

against Jehovah. Then Elijah announced that he would prove the reality and might of Jehovah over Baal, and undertook to meet, for that purpose, 450 priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. What sublime confidence! What awful risk!

III. THE VINDICATION OF JEHOVAH ON MOUNT CARMEL.

The great day dawned. A mighty concourse of people gathered on the slopes of Carmel, waiting in silence the proof that the Lord is God. On the summit, the gorgeously-apparelled king, encompassed by the priests and prophets of Baal and Jezebel, made an imposing panorama. And standing in his solitary grandeur, was the rugged presence of the only Prophet of Jehovah. But the great concourse of people was silent. They feared to proclaim themselves for Jehovah; they feared to attach themselves, out and out, to Baal.

To Elijah,—the man of fiery impulse, of single motive, of unwavering conviction,—this was intolerable; and the thunder-tones of his voice pealed forth from Carmel: "How long halt ye between two opinions! If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him."

The Elijah type of man *must* have a conviction about something. He cannot live in a pendulum state, swinging from one opinion to another of right and wrong. His pent-up powers must cut a channel for themselves in some one direction. And it is the Elijah spirit that compels the wavering to make their choice. Yet the people still were silent.

Then, with flashing eyes, and heart exultant with the conviction of victory, he turned to the priests of Baal, and said: "Your God or mine shall be vindicated this day by the power of prayer. If you can prevail on Baal to send down fire to consume a bullock on this ground, let Baal be the true God." Then the priests of Baal began their incantations and prayers. But Baal gave no sign. And Elijah, feeling that at last his life-passion was to be satisfied, and Jehovah once more made Israel's only God, desired to convince the people more forcibly of their foolishness in worshipping a heedless idol. Therefore, he mockingly incited the priests to further desperate effort; and all day long they besought Baal to hear them; but though they lacerated their flesh, and shouted themselves hoarse, Baal made no sign.

So stepped forward the Prophet of Jehovah. In strange contrast to the wild antics of the priests, he knelt down quietly, and with simple earnest reverence, prayed: "Lord God, prove Thyself now to this people for what Thou art, and take them to Thyself again, for they have wandered far from Thee." And immediately the fire kindled beneath the altar, and burnt up everything upon it.

Then the vast concourse answered, as with one voice: "The Lord, He is God, the Lord, He is God," and wild with enthusiasm, they rushed upon the priests and prophets of Baal, and destroyed them to a man.

IV. THE WEAKNESS OF THE MAN OF STRENGTH.

Surely this was the most triumphant moment of Elijah's life! With Jehovah vindicated, with Baal proved false and his priests dead, with the people reclaimed, could Elijah have won a completer victory?

Yet the next picture paints him as fleeing for his life into Judea! What had happened? When Jezebel learnt the news of Elijah's success over her priests, and the death they had suffered at the instigation of Elijah, she swiftly determined on his death. Then the enthusiasm of the people—which had been roused to such a pitch by Elijah's achievement on Mount Carmel—melted away as quickly as it came. When they found that the queen was a greater enemy than ever to Jehovah, and Jehovah's Prophet, they all seemed to sink back, abjectly, into the worship of Baal again. And Elijah's heart sank back, too. The triumph of Carmel, then, was an illusion: the only reality was Jezebel's threat of murder.

Wearied, despondent, alone, he crept into the wilderness near Beersheba, and sat down beneath a juniper tree, praying only that he might die, for he had succeeded no better than his fathers, *i.e.*, his great attempt for God had been a failure,—not one had remained true,—the nation was as hopeless as ever, with Ahab and Jezebel at its head.

V. VICTORY BEHIND FAILURE.

Then it was that God met His servant, and dealt with him in loving wisdom. At the outset, his body was ministered to,—proving that religious depression is often due simply to physical causes,—that a sick body explains many a sick soul. Then the great forces of nature are let loose, and hurricane and earthquake seem to be but the outward expression of Elijah's inward tumult. A thunderstorm is often a wonderful minister to us by giving utterance, as it were, to our pent-up feelings, and so relieving them. Thus it was with

Elijah; the storm and earthquake seemed to carry away the tumult within, and leave the quiet heart which hears the still, small Voice.

God was not in the hurricane or the earthquake, but in the still, small Voice. So Elijah might learn the truth that the divinest work is not always that which is the most startling and conspicuous—as the destruction of Baal and the conversion of the great multitude on Mount Carmel—but that which is quiet and insignificant, as when Elijah ministered to the poor woman of Zarephath.

To the heart of the Prophet came the still small Voice, saying: "What doest thou here?" To which Elijah moaningly replied: "The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant; Thy Prophets are slain; I only am left, and I am sought after to be slain also."

"Prophet of Mine," said the still, small Voice, "life is too serious—too pressing—to be frittered away under a juniper tree, in despairing complaint. Your work has not failed,—no sincere piece of work for Me can ever fail; and My cause is not lost. The great crowd you thought you had won on Carmel has not all gone back to idolatry. There are 7,000 who, through you, refuse now to bow the knee to Baal. Ahab's reign is done. Another king needs anointing; and behold another Prophet is at your side to follow in your steps,—a young man who, all unknown to you, has been training his life by yours. Elisha shall carry on your work when you are gone. But now go forth. What doest thou here—away from the battlefield where you are still so much needed? What doest thou here, with hands limp by your side, and with doleful face, because you think you have failed? What doest thou here, Prophet of daring, hiding thy head out of fear of an idolatrous woman? Go back, go back to the duty that was yours, and never venture again to talk of failure."

Elijah went back,—chastened and softened, but with the old, unswerving courage. He told Ahab, face to face, of his approaching death, anointed the future king, cast his mantle over Elisha, because Elisha had caught his spirit, and leaving him to complete his life-work, this wonderful Prophet of God disappeared as mysteriously as he had come,—a chariot of fire whirled him upwards, into Heaven.

VI. THE MANTLE OF ELIJAH.

So Elijah did not die. Such a man never really dies. His spirit rose again in Elisha. In every noble patriot, reformer, martyr, Elijah lives again. He is the type of the intense, fearless, swift-acting individuality, which sees one course before it, whenever the spectre of wrong looms up,—the course of destruction, un pitying, uncompromising. No wavering, no vacillation, as to what will be the personal cost. A holy ferocity possesses such, and they will stand alone against a throne or a nation, in vindication of their Jehovah, and in denunciation of a Baal. These men are always feared and hated, the men with some burning conviction which is dearer to them than life.

Oh, we need more of the Elijah spirit, in so far as it impels us to be firm and brave in our convictions, in so far as it forces us to answer, clearly and unhesitatingly, the question: "Which of the two—Baal or Jehovah?" Lack of definiteness—of incisiveness—in our conduct, is the chief cause of feebleness in Christian character, and of failure to *achieve* anything in life.

Who is wearing the mantle of Elijah? Who has heard the Carmel call: "If the Lord be God follow Him,"—and heeded it? Who has made the choice whom he will serve? Are you waiting for another Elijah to come to prove God to you by miraculous intervention, before you will take your stand? But, in these later times, the Divine appeal is only made to the higher sense. You can know God only by yielding yourselves to Him—not before. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" demands the voice of an Elijah, the voice of the Christ, the voice of the inmost self, the voice that speaks through all that is true, and lovely, and pure. "How long halt ye?" If God *is* God, then you cannot be throwing self away by an utter yielding to Him; you cannot be doing a foolish thing by renouncing the idol worship of your heart, be that a worship of whatever sin it may. The only rational position is to determine, once for all, whom we will serve, and then to venture our *all* upon our choice. We must have an Elijah-like central impulse and conviction in our hearts, before we can know the true power and divineness of our manhood and womanhood.

Elisha

BY RIGHT REV. SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, D.D.

"The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha."—2 Kings ii. 15.

No two men are linked together more closely in Scripture history than Elijah and Elisha; and no two are in character and the circumstances of their lives more sharply opposed to each other. Elijah stands before us suddenly, without one note of preparation, in the fulness of the prophetic office as "the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead"; startling Ahab in his pride of power as though called by the king's sins out of the earth on which he stood; and denouncing judgment on him in the name of "the Lord God of Israel before Whom I stand." We have no hint of the training for the Prophet's office which preceded this its sudden development, though we may conjecture that his frame was hardened on the mountain ranges of Gilead, and his spirit attuned by solitary musings to the notes of power and judgment which marked all his prophetic utterances.

Elisha, on the contrary, comes before us with a touch of circumstance which almost reveals to us the history of his youth. He is "Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah." Instead of the child of the desert, full of the wild strength bred of lonely wanderings amidst the ranges of Gilead, we have the child of a peaceful, wealthy agricultural home in the rich valleys of the Jordan. There, on his father's lands, Elisha is superintending the ploughing of the fertile soil. The dark, awful form of the elder Prophet rises suddenly on his view, and overshadows his soul with the mystery of a spirit's presence. He does not ask the errand on which the great messenger was bound; he does not venture to disturb the stride of that silent figure even with the congenial offer of an hospitable reception. But as Elijah passes by, still, as it seems, speechless, and as one borne onward by some Divine impulse, he pauses for a moment, and the young man finds cast upon his shoulders the well-known sheepskin mantle of the mighty Tishbite. Jehovah's call even in the doing of that simple act subdues his whole spirit, and he leaves the oxen and runs after the Prophet, saying, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and I will follow thee." Elijah, with that deep knowledge of the springs of human conduct which is bred in solitary spirits by the introverted gaze so familiar to their souls, does but fix the hook in the already captive will of him whom he has mystically summoned, by the seeming disavowal of his act in the words, "Go back again, for what have I done unto thee?" Elisha's soul felt what he had done, and with no half-reverted, half-longing gaze after the sweetness of the home life which he knew was lost to him, but with the determination of a settled purpose which needed not to fly from enticements which he had already in his strong will subdued, he returns back from the departing Prophet, slays for a parting feast of consecration the oxen whom he should guide no more along the furrows of the familiar plain, and then, having bid adieu to his father and his mother, arises, and goes after Elijah, and ministers to him.

Moreover, whereas Elijah's training is as untraceable as his call, we have at least the outline history of that of Elisha. He was known afterwards to one of the servants of Jehoshaphat the king of Israel as "the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah." For seven years at least the companionship and the training seems to have lasted; seven years which would stamp deeply on the receptive nature of the younger man many of the great outlines of the prophetic character of his master and his friend. And when at last he heard the fearful warning, "Knowest thou not that the Lord will take thy master from thy head to-day?" and felt that he was henceforth to bear alone all the heavy burden of the Prophet's office, we know as to Elisha the accompaniments, as well as the fact of the full accomplishment, of his call. The Spirit of God has recorded for us those unresting journeyings between Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, which preceded the ascent of the great Tishbite into Heaven; the last communings of the departing Prophet with his successor; the permission, "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee," in which as though conscious of his approaching audience with the mighty Lord of all, he offers to send back from the heavenly treasury whatever his faithful follower might know himself to need; the "hard thing" which Elisha's craving soul desired—the double portion—the eldest son's inheritance—of his master's spirit; the doubtful grant of the

bold petition, confirmed by the open vision of the ascension granted to his wondering eyes; the assumption of his master's mantle by the widowed successor; and the miraculous opening of his ministry, by the smiting and dividing with it of the Jordan waters.

This diversity in the providential training of the two Prophets in some degree prepares us for the broad distinction stamped from the very first upon their prophetic course. Elijah's had been a dispensation of judgment; Elisha's was a dispensation of gentleness. He delivers the kings of Israel, Judah, and Edom from the destruction which lay before them in their campaign against Moab; he multiplies the supply of oil from the single barrel, which was the sole remaining property of the widow of the son of the Prophets, whose two sons were about to be sold for debt; he obtains for the childless "great woman of Shunem" the coveted gift of a son, and, many years afterwards, miraculously restores him to life when the fatal stroke of the summer's sun had brought him to the grave; he heals the poisoned food, which threatened at Gilgal the lives of the company of the sons of the Prophets; he multiplies the ears of corn to feed a needy crowd; he heals the leprosy of Naaman; he recovers the borrowed axe-head lost in the waters of the Jordan; and, finally, the very touch of his bones, in the tomb in which his body had been honourably laid, brings back its life to the corpse which had been thrust hastily beside his mouldering remains. It is not possible to mistake the character of this series of miracles. From first to last they bear upon them all the attributes of visitations of mercy. They are the very opposite of the judicial inflictions with which, through Elijah, the power of God broke forth to punish evil and to overawe the guilty.

Yet, as in the severe course of Elijah there is one touching scene of tenderness in the bringing back to life the son of the afflicted widow; so, as though to make the contrast complete, in the midst of the long list of Elisha's miracles of mercy there occur two miracles of startling judgment, absolutely needful, probably, in the evil days on which he was cast, for the assertion of his true prophetic character, and so for his fulfilment of the work which he was set to do. The first of them belongs to the early part of his career. Going, at the beginning of his long ministry, from Jericho to Mount Carmel, he passes through the town of Bethel; there, pre-eminently, the peculiar sin of Samaria had become inveterate, and had poisoned all the springs of reverence for Jehovah and His messengers. As he treads the hot ascent skirting the forest depths which had grown rankly over ruined Ai, the children of the idol worshippers, encouraged by their father's sin, if not by their father's actual presence, mocked the new representative of Jehovah's Majesty. They had trembled, it would seem, before the personal presence of the great Nazirite, and they ridiculed the smaller stature and more ordinary aspect of Elisha. "Go up, thou hair-cropped one, go up," was the taunt of those who might have seen with something of awe in Elijah the likeness of their mighty Samson. But the message of the Lord was not to be despised, and there fell upon the Prophet the inspiration of judgment; and the curse which he pronounced on them, in the name of the Lord, was forthwith executed on the mockers by the savage denizens of the neighbouring wood.

The other miracle of judgment seems dictated by a like necessity of protecting the ministry committed to him from falling into a dangerous contempt. It was the binding on Gehazi and his seed the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian. It was a note like that utterance of St. Peter against Simon Magus, "Thy money perish with thee."

But it was not only in the exercise of his miraculous gifts and the character of his miracles that this especial character of gentleness hung round the second great Prophet of separated Israel, and distinguished him from his mighty predecessor. There is the same difference running through the whole recorded stream of his life. He is the Prophet of society, as Elijah was the Prophet of solitude. He tarries with the sons of the Prophets in their several haunts; he dwells in Jericho; nay, we find from incidental notices that he was possessed of a house of his own. For when, at his bidding, Naaman, the Syrian leper, is sent to him for the cure which the king of Israel had despairingly pronounced himself unable to procure, the great stranger comes "with his horses and his chariot, and stands at the door of the house of Elisha" (2 Kings v. 9). Another passage, too, suggests an inference as to the size of his dwelling, which seems to imply that the inheritance of the son of Shaphat had not been abandoned by the Prophet Elisha, for we read that "Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him" (2 Kings vi. 32). Nor was it only the elders whom his mansion was capacious enough to receive, for we find the king of Israel visiting him in it; and the direction, "Open the window eastward," marks, from its possessing such an instrument almost

of luxury, the character of the dwelling-place. From these passing incidents, we may with certainty infer that, whilst Elijah was in the habits of his life the counterpart of the Arab of the desert, Elisha was the example of the civilised denizen of the town. And as he lives he dies. For him no fiery chariot waits. Like ordinary men he is "sick of the sickness whereof he dies." Round his death-bed friends gather; the king hears of his illness, and visits the departing Prophet; the slow progresses of gradual decay accomplish their work; he gathers up his feet into his bed, and dies; and his honoured body is interred in a marked and well-known tomb.

We must not, however, associate any idea of weakness with Elisha's character. On the contrary, though there were more dramatic incidents of outward danger, and therefore more startling displays of courage and of strength in the career of his master; and though his desert life and wild ministry was of necessity fuller of picturesque lights and deep shadows, than that of the child of civilisation and society, yet Elisha's was really the more perilous life to lead. The double portion of the Tishbite's spirit was needed by him quite as much to uphold Jehovah's witness in the greater temptations to which his easier life exposed him, as it was to enable him to work the larger abundance of miracles which were requisite as credentials of the prophetic character in one living as an ordinary man amongst his fellow-men. It was comparatively natural for those who only saw Elijah suddenly emerge from his unknown dwelling-place, and by some terrible denunciations strike dismay into the heart of Ahab, and then retire again into the trackless haunt from which he had issued, to believe that he was the messenger of Him Who had spoken to their fathers from the thick darkness amidst the thunders and the fires of Sinai. But to force upon them the conviction that one who lived amongst them, apparently just as they lived, was yet as truly Jehovah's witness, needed that perpetual display of more than human power which was so exceptionally exuberant in Elisha's ministry. And so for the inner life of his own soul greater visitations of the Divine Spirit were doubtless needed amidst the temptations of the court and the camp, and the town residence of Jericho and the country sojourning of Dothan, than when, as with Elijah, God and the soul were brought so awfully alone together, in the destitution of all outer things, amidst the savage scenes of the wilderness. But with all this difference there is no trace of weakness in the outline of Elisha's life and ministry. On the contrary, the sacred narrative seems studiously to record instances in which humanity, in all its strength, of fire, of tenderness, and of daring, breaks out amidst the tamer features which surround the more civilised man. Thus as examples: In the record of Elisha's great parallel miracle to that of Elijah, in raising to life the widow's son, there is a depth of tenderness which is not reached in the former history, touching as it is. The "great woman" of Shunem receives from the hot harvest field, with the cry of "My head, my head!" the son so marvellously given to her longing embrace. The boy sits upon her knees till noon, and then dies. The bereaved Shunammite, with all an Eastern mother's love and inward resolution, speaks no word of sorrow; calmly tells her husband it shall be well, and mounts her ass, whilst with an eagerness which, for the first time, speaks an inward agony and purpose that will carry her through any toil, she bids her servant, "Drive and go forward; slack not thy riding for me except I bid thee." In the heat of her spirit she comes to the man of God to Mount Carmel. He, accustomed to her coming "at the new moon and the sabbath," as he worships amidst the shadows of the mountains, marks her distant approach, and waits for her until she comes to him on the hill-side, when she "caught him by the feet." Then comes that answer of Elisha, which goes straight to every heart, as he reproached the servant who would have "thrust her away": "Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me."

Again, what inward fire reveals itself as underlying the level outward crust of that calm character, in his words to the elders of Israel when King Jehoram sent to seize him,—“See how this son of a murderer hath sent to take away my head!”

Again, what holy daring is there in his answer to Jehoram when he came in his extremity of distress from the forces of Moab to seek counsel of the Prophet of the Lord,—“What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. As the Lord of Hosts liveth before Whom I stand, if it were not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, I would not look to thee or see thee.”

It is well to note these indications of vast moral strength and purpose in Elisha, not

only that we may form a true estimate of his actual character, but also to prepare us for considering the last reason to be here mentioned why one so different from Elijah may have been chosen as his successor.

From first to last, all Scripture is full of Christ. In direct prediction, in type, in example, He is ever re-appearing. It is the perpetual presence of this one master-figure, the marvel that throughout the ten thousand mysterious characters which are inscribed upon that still unrolling scroll the same image ever recurs, which, to the eye of faith, makes up the mighty wholeness of the prophetic record.

One great instance of such acted prediction appears in the succession of Elisha to Elijah. Our Master's own express words have, in a manner, identified the Prophet of Gilead with the Baptist. The resemblance is most striking: the desert home, the austere fare, the awakening message, the sinking of each great heart under the overwhelming pressure of disappointment and rejection, the cry of Elijah under the juniper tree of the wilderness echoed in the message of John from the dungeon, the scantiness of Elijah's compared with Elisha's miracles, set side by side with the fact that John did no miracles; the one rebuking Ahab, the other Herod; the persecution of Elijah by the king of Israel, stirred up by his queen, driving him, as it were, for refuge to the fiery chariot,—that of John by Herod, stirred up by his brother Philip's wife, ending John's sufferings under the sword of the executioner, and sending him to his rest. Then, too, the unfinished work of each, left to be accomplished by his successor, stamp on each alike the marked description of "forerunner." Nor when we turn from Elijah to Elisha can we fail to see the figure of the Son of Man mysteriously veiled beneath the outward aspect of the second Prophet. For in Elisha's life in contrast with Elijah's is the very counterpart of that which tested and condemned the wilful unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees. "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Again, the solitary child of the desert was the forerunner of Him Who sat at the Pharisee's table and lived in the house of Mary and of Martha. Again, there is the same contrast between the moral characteristics as between the accidents recorded of the forerunner and the follower in the history of the Prophets of Israel, and in the records of the Evangelists. There is the almost unrelieved severity of holiness of the one; there is its entire compassionateness in the other. In both cases the biting blasts of the desert proclaim their rude contrast to the soft breezes of Abel-meholah. There is the "Let her alone" of the Prophet, when the servant would thrust away the woman who caught him by the feet; there is the "Let her alone" of the Lord when Mary anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair. There is the weeping for the evils coming on the chosen people when Elisha read in Hazael's face the future woe, and when the Lord looked sadly on to the flight of the Roman eagle to Jerusalem. There are the sons of the Prophets looking up in all things to their master; there are the twelve hanging on the Master's words, and St. John leaning on His breast. There is in the pitifulness of Elisha a faint human copy of the all-embracing tenderness which breathed in those words of wonder, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Again, the resemblance between the special miracles of our Blessed Lord and those of Elisha is most marked. For Elisha feeds with the few ears of corn the hungry multitude; he cleanses the leper; he raises the dead to life; he multiplies the oil for the widow of the son of the prophets, and says, "Go sell the oil and pay the debt," as our Lord puts forth His power to enable Peter to pay the tribute money. Nay, even in the last recorded miracle wrought at his tomb, when the dead man about to be buried is, by reason of the sudden incursion of the invading bands of Moabites, thrust with precipitation into Elisha's tomb, and on touching the Prophet's bones rises and stands upon his feet, we have in the far back ages a wonderful picture of every Christian man's death and rising again. For does not that caverned grave speak of the new tomb hewn in the rock wherein He lay Who by death overcame death: Who by laying in the grave brought into it for every one of us the light of Heaven and the companionship of Angels? Does it not speak of that reviving and standing on his feet which shall befall every one who by faith does indeed touch the Lord's body? and so is there not written as the interpretation of a miracle, the like of which is not to be found recorded in either Testaments, and which is at first sight startling from this singularity, as the legend of the whole life of the son of Shaphat, "Behold, a greater than Elisha is here"?

Nor is it only of the Lord in His own person of Whom Elisha is thus a type. He

foreshadowed in a most remarkable manner the Christ in His Church. "All the Law and the Prophets prophesied until John." In him the old dispensation passed away. After him, as Elisha after Elijah, came the Son of God in the Kingdom of Heaven, the Christ in His Church; with the double portion of the Spirit; with far greater powers; doing "greater works"; with the Gospel gentleness instead of the thunders of the Law; with the pervading universal influence from the gift of Pentecost which was to leaven all society and spread through all empires, instead of being the witness of a solitary people in the wilderness of the world to the unity of the Godhead.

Here is the last fulfilment of all that Elisha foreshadowed. No greater Prophet than the mighty Tishbite had ever shaken the heart of Israel; yet his successor in the Prophet's office received a double portion of his master's spirit; and so, whilst of the great Baptist it has been declared, "Amongst them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist," it is added, "Notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

Elisha

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

"As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand," etc.—2 Kings v. 16.

The substance of these words was embodied in the lives of all the holy men of the Bible, but the very words were only used by two of them—the Prophet Elijah, and his disciple and successor, Elisha, who doubtless learned them from his lips. Twice did Elijah repeat them in what we call grand and heroic hours in his life: when he commenced his conflict alone and unsupported against the iniquity and idolatries of his time, and when that conflict reached its culminating point in the dramatic scene on Mount Carmel. Twice also did Elisha repeat them in circumstances not so perilous, but equally trying to one's conscience and faith. Once was when three kings who had determined to wage an unjust war offered him a great reward if he would pronounce God's blessing upon it. And the second when Naaman, the foreign statesman, tempted him with a bribe, and on both occasions he answered indignantly, "As the Lord liveth before Whom I stand, I will take none."

In times then when they had to face great odds or resist seductive temptations, when the evil powers of the world were opposing and threatening them, and when those same powers were smiling on them and offering them favours and gifts if they would sell their independence and conscience, this was the word on which they took their stand. They fell back upon the thought of a living God in Whose presence they stood continually, Whose servants they were, Whose mighty hand would surely uphold, and by Whose final and decisive judgment they would be tried. They planted their feet on this rock and were immovable.

I. WE HAVE A PICTURE OF THE FEARLESS LIFE.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be quiet from the fear of evil." That is the feature which distinguishes these two men throughout. They were not soldiers, they carried no weapons. They had no material resources or human forces behind them. They generally stood unarmed and alone without allies, and without visible support, yet were they absolutely without fear, nay, rather full of a superhuman confidence and at times of a quite sublime audacity. To watch them and hear them talk you might suppose that they were the masters of legions, that vast armies waited their word of command, or that they spoke in the name of some mighty kingdom which would employ all its forces in their support and defence. Elijah deals with Ahab and his soldiers and his four hundred prophets as if they were men of straw. Of his own danger he seems to be utterly unconscious. He feels only that he is encircled by invisible arms. God is nearer to him than all that rabble crew. "The Lord liveth, before Whom I stand." Take that other scene hardly less striking in Elisha's life. The Syrian army with their captains and chariots and all the imposing engines of war have compassed him about to carry him a prisoner to their king. The Prophet's servant is terrified! Alas, my master what shall we do? And Elisha answers as calmly and joyfully as if they were going to a wedding feast. "Fear not; they that be for us are more than they that be against." Then he asks that the young man's eyes may be opened and shews him

the army of the living God filling the air and the mountains around them, and finally, he plays with all those soldiers and their captains as Elijah had played with Baal's host, doing with them whatever he pleases as if he held omnipotence in his hands. It is wonderful indeed. Yet the explanation of it is all here. "As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand." These men had never seen God's face or heard His voice any more than we have, yet in some real, deep sense they beheld Him continually. They felt that they were never removed from His presence. He was closer to them than breathing, nearer than hands and feet; His power was at their right hand and within them, giving strength to their hands, steadiness to their nerves, and constancy to their purpose. And that made them moral giants, strong as if ten thousand hearts were combined in one and as fearless as if they had invincible battalions at their back.

When men hear the voice of the eternal God they become deaf to the lowest voices. Just as when we are listening to the majestic roar and roll of the ocean we regard not the petty tattle that goes on by our side. So these men regarded not the threats and braggart voices of the faithless crowds around them. What were Ahab, Jezebel, Ben-hadad, and their armies when set against the march and roll of God's Almighty forces? If God is truly King over the whole earth, then these are but puppets moving as He pulls the strings; pawns upon the world's chess board which He uses or sweeps off at His will, and only those who are working on the lines of His commandments can feel at rest, can walk with a sense of security, and can lull all their fears to sleep nestling in the arms of a watchful love. If we are sure that God is with us in this battle field of life, that He is near enough in the conflict to place over us the very shadow of His power, and that His love is pledged to support us in life's darkest and most desperate moments; that certainty will steady and nerve us, and lift us above all the panic fears, and cowardly dependencies of the unbelieving. There are no finite forces worth counting by him who has placed his life in the keeping of the Infinite One. The odds are not against us unless we set Him against us by striving right in the teeth of His will. The strong men and women are those whose consciences bear witness of His approval, who command His alliance by their simple trust and obedience, and carry His besetting presence with them wherever they go. They who are most afraid of losing His favour are never afraid of anything else. If we have a genuine fear of sin and of everything which would separate us from Him, we shall know no other terrors. Neither sickness nor misfortune, nor death itself can overthrow the confidence of those whom God's protection covers and who know that they are held in the hollow of His hand. "As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand."

II. THESE WORDS RING OUT THE MOTTO OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE LIFE.

"As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand, I will receive none." Naaman, the Syrian, wants to heap treasures upon him. It must not be, he cannot receive gifts from this heathen man for doing the Lord's work upon him. It is like making barter of the Holy Ghost. Nor can he, who is the sworn counsellor of the King of Israel, take bribes from the representative of a foreign power. It would be selling his independence and sacrificing his honesty. Elisha could not do this thing. He put aside the load of treasures without a moment's hesitation. The temptation had not a feather weight. And for this reason, "As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand." Possibly no one else might ever hear of that transaction. No bird would carry it to the king's ear. Naaman might never mention it again. Take the gold! it shall be between thee and me alone. No! it could never be secret. The all-watchful eyes were looking down upon the two men and one of them never forgot it, though the other might. This man walked for ever in the searching light of God's face. He knew that his every act, word, and thought were naked and open in the eyes of Him with Whom he had to do. He stood for ever before the judgment throne of God, and knew that for every such transaction he would have to render an account. The gilded temptation of the world had no attraction for him. He was incorruptible. "As the Lord liveth, before Whom I stand, I will receive none."

I do not believe that any man can remain steadily and persistently incorruptible in this world of subtle temptation and insidious seductions unless he is fortified by the same consciousness of the watchful all-regarding presence. The bribes which the world offers are so various and so many. The man who is not tempted by gold is tempted by popularity, by position, by flattery. The temptations to crooked dealings meet us at every turn. The statesman is bribed by office and the love of popular favour. The prominent citizen by votes and flattering notices in the press. The business man by

fifty lucrative allurements. The young man by the hope of getting on, or by the cozening words of unscrupulous companions. The maiden and the woman by the bribes of the gay and fashionable world, or the chance of advantageous but unholy marriage. A thousand baits are offered that every taste may be appealed to, and only those will pass them all by who never forget that they are living their lives under the great task-master's eye, that by His verdict each day is judged, and that by His final sentence they must stand or fall.

We want more of that among all sorts and conditions of men, among the great and the lowly, among the statesmen who guide the destinies of a nation, among the workmen who carry through its humblest tasks; more of what our fathers called the fear of God, a deeper and more abiding sense of that overreaching and besetting presence which is full of eyes within and without; which pierces through all disguises and coverings, and with infinite justice as well as pitying love takes the measure of all that we do.

If you have that every work you do will be done honestly, every word you speak will be spoken with a measure of soberness and sincerity, and your lives will be like a palace in which the King of Kings is not ashamed to walk. If you know that God is looking on it will make you brave as well as conscientious, patient as well as dutiful. If you are serving in His presence the hardest service will feel liberty. If you are suffering under His eyes it will almost be joy to suffer. You will not fret and murmur if you are sure that He hears. You will bear all things if you are certain that His kindly eyes are never withdrawn, and that His pitiful heart never forgets.

Naaman

BY REV. JAMES ALSOP, B.A.

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria," etc.—2 Kings v. 1.

Few chapters in the Bible contain more instruction than this one.

I. We see a gallant and successful soldier, the commander-in-chief of the armies of a mighty empire; one who was beloved and honoured by his king and country for the great services he had rendered them; one who had been a special instrument in God's Providence; one who was held, for his valour and merits, the highest in that glory, which men so generally covet. But great as his merits and his honours were, he carried that about him which turned all the sweetness of life into gall; he was the victim of a most loathsome and incurable disease, for the healing of which he would, doubtless, have gladly exchanged places with the lowest common soldier in his army. "He was a leper."

Let us learn from this, not to feel envy at the great. We are apt to look almost with evil eyes on those who are above us in the possession of what are thought the prizes of life; to think, when we see others in splendid mansions, surrounded with all the pomp and magnificence of wealth, with power and honour for their handmaidens, that if we had those things we should be free from care and anxiety, and should be content and happy.

What a mistake is this! Those whom we envy are, perhaps, at the very same time envying us. A diseased body, or an unquiet mind, the want of children, disappointed ambition, the cares that attend state, disgust and satiety with too much having, not to mention the misery of those vices to which wealth and power often give birth, one or more of these relentless fangs is gnawing at the heart, and would change, if known, our envy into pity. These great ones seem to have all the goods of life, but, like Naaman, they are "lepers." The good and evil things, as they are called, of this world are much more equally distributed than we generally imagine. If you are obliged to work hard for your daily bread, you are free from those diseases of mind and body which wealth and idleness produce; and you enjoy that "sweet sleep that belongs to the labouring man." If you have not wealth, you are free from its many cares and temptations. If you have not honour, you have a sound body, and a cheerful heart. If you have not houses and lands, parks and trees, you have "children like the olive branches round about thy table." Your name may be unknown beyond your neighbours, but envy not any mighty Naaman. Be content, and cheerful, and thankful, if thou

hast sound health, a good conscience, and a simple faith in Christ; for what are all the goods of life, if thou art a "leper"?

II. This mighty and miserable man seems to have been a good, kind master; otherwise his servants, one and all, would not have been so deeply interested in his well-being as we find they were. His own sufferings had made him kind and gentle to those about him, even to the lowest. "It was good for him that he had been in trouble."

This, again, should teach us not to murmur and complain at the sorest chastisement, which God may be pleased to lay upon us; but rather to see in it, and faithfully expect by it, that which will do us good in the latter end. "If we be without chastisement, then are we bastards, and not sons." Let our sorrows, moreover, teach us to be gentle, and tender to others. Affection, kindness, and consideration are never lost. They are little streams that become rivers to refresh the land of their birth. As saith the Scripture: "He that watereth shall be watered also himself."

III. In the household of this unhappy great man was a little captive maid of Israel. The sufferings of her lord had touched her pity, as his kindness had won her love. She had been taught, when a very little child, in her own dear native land, to believe in God, and to look for the manifestations of His love and power through the ministry of His Church; and now, when home, country, parents, all were lost to her, save that which no misfortune can take away, religious teaching, well does she use the Catechism which she had learnt. In the strong earnest language of genuine faith, she prays before her mistress, that her lord might be known to one "who could recover him even of his leprosy."

What mingled feelings must have thrilled through the heart of the mighty Syrian, when he heard those words of the captive maiden offering deliverance to the all-conquering warrior; when, with trembling hope, he saw that in the little maiden he had kindly treated, he had been "entertaining unawares an angel," and minister of love to himself.

IV. The Syrian Captain at once sets out upon his journey. Secret misgivings he might have as to its success; but like a wise man, anxious for a cure, he does not despise any possible means thereto, though made known to him by the most humble instrument; nor does he neglect any other thing which might be useful for his purpose. He takes a letter from his own king to the king of Israel, and great treasures as offerings to those from whom he might receive his cure. He probably thought that, in consideration of his high rank, the king of Israel would order the Prophet of whom he had heard such things, to be sent for, to heal him at the court, with magnificent ceremonial; or he might think the Prophet was no other than the king's physician, some very skilful healer of bodily diseases. Great, no doubt, was his surprise and disappointment to find that the physician, whom he had come so far to see, was not even *known* in the court of the king of the country. Naaman was yet, let us remember, an heathen and an idolater. How could he then know that "God hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes"? How strange it would seem to him that the king of Israel did not know either the person or the power of that Prophet, of whom the little maid had told him such wondrous things!

V. Though Naaman fails in his object at the king's court, he does not, from offended pride, abandon the pursuit. Elisha had heard of his coming, and of the king's speech, and he sends a message that the Syrian should visit him at his own poor house. Perhaps Naaman did not much like being *sent for*, as if he were an inferior person; but the hope of cure and his religious feelings overcome his wounded dignity, and he comes with his splendid company, "his horses and his chariot, and stands before the door of the house of Elisha."

And then follows the most severe trial of his humility and faith. Not only does the Prophet refuse to come forth, but the message he sends seems trifling and contemptible: "Go, wash in Jordan seven times." So no great miracle is to be performed after all; no great sacrifice is to be demanded; the Prophet will make no display of his own power, nor allow his suppliant to show his zeal by any extraordinary act of self-devotion. "Go, wash in Jordan." And has he come from Syria for this? to be treated with such indignity and contempt! to be told to do a thing so mean, so small, so trifling! to wash in a river, pitiful when compared with "Abana and Pharpar the rivers of Damascus." "No, if the Prophet had shown some extraordinary miracle or sign, or demanded from me some extraordinary proof of my willingness to do, or sacrifice much for a cure, I would most willingly have obeyed his directions; but to insult me with such a simple command is

more than I can bear; the Captain of the hosts of Syria may not be treated, cannot be cured, in so mean and contemptible a way." The man's pride, and zeal, and religious excitement, all rebelled against the means of recovery ordered. "I will not believe that my deadly disease can be so healed," says he; "so he turned and went away in a rage."

VI. Naaman had now turned his back on his last hope of cure, and had he been left to himself, he had thus gone back to his own land, and died as he had lived, "a leper." But here, again, he is saved by those whom, though his inferiors, his goodness had made his friends. His servants reasoned with him on the folly of his conduct. In an Eastern country to argue with a superior, or in any way to contradict or control him when enraged, is almost certain death; but Naaman's servants seem to have had no fear of this kind. He had been good and gentle to them; and now, like his better angels, they throw themselves in his wayward path, and lovingly, but firmly, protest against the folly of his proceeding. "My Father!" such are the words in which they speak to him. Volumes could not more fully express the depth of their affection. What a blessed thing for him that he had used his prosperity well. He is not now left alone in the hour of his terrible temptation and trial. The struggle is over; the temptation is vanquished; the intercession has prevailed; he obeys the Prophet's orders; he washes; he is clean; his dreadful disease is gone.

Brethren, let us learn from all this to use our prosperity, our mental gifts, our worldly goods, our position in life, in doing constantly good, kind service to those around us. Any of us may be sorely tempted to wrong doing, yea, even to the extent of destroying our own souls; and a fearful thing it is to stand in temptation alone. Alone, Naaman would have been lost. Let us make to ourselves those best friends which are made by good deeds. Let us show our love to all; but especially to those who, in any way, are our inferiors. In some severe trial, in some temptation to mortal sin, we may, under God, be stayed from falling by their watchful regard, by their remonstrance, or by their prayers.

VII. Naaman, filled with gratitude at his extraordinary cure, returns to the Prophet, who, it seems, no longer refused to show himself; and he strongly urged him to accept a present. "Take, I pray thee," says he, "a blessing of thy servant." Elisha had particular reasons for declining to accept his munificent and generous tokens of gratitude, but the Syrian's right feeling and sincerity in making the offer remain the same. He had received a signal mercy from God, through His Church; and in acknowledgment he wished like David, "not to offer unto the Lord of that which did cost him nothing." He had before proved his faith and his humility by his obedience. Now he would prove his gratitude and thankfulness by his gifts.

And is there nothing here too, brethren, which reproachfully says to the conscience of some of you: "Go, and do thou likewise"? Have not some of you received, through the Ministry of Christ's Church, mercies and blessings far greater than the *bodily* healing of Naaman the Syrian? Spiritual birth into God's family; religious truth; greater light; more abundant knowledge; grace to resist sin; grace to repent of it; spiritual consolations; ministerial sympathy; all these remedies for the healing of sin, that leprosy of the soul! Has your gratitude been proved to God, as Naaman's was, by large-hearted offerings at His shrine?

Gehazi

BY REV. J. H. GURNEY, M.A.

"But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha," etc.—2 Kings v. 20.

In this beginning of this chapter we have an account of a faithful servant, living in the midst of heathenism, who was the instrument in God's hands of conferring on her master a double blessing. The *little maid* who waited on Naaman's wife, humble and modest as she was, has a conspicuous place in a story of no common interest. At her suggestion the syrian Captain went to the Prophet Elisha to seek the cure of his loathsome malady; and from Elisha he came back to his own country, vowing that no God but the Lord should henceforth receive from him sacrifice or meat offering. At the end of this chapter we have a very different character presented to us,—an unprincipled servant, a practised liar and cheat, apparently, living in the house of a Prophet.

And what do we see here but human life as it is? How shall a tale be weaved that has the semblance of truth, without being marred by something loathsome and unsightly?

Men may amuse themselves by conjuring up a world of their own, all bright and beautiful, with no dark spots, and no unseemly intruders. But the thing is no more true than the most extravagant illusions that dance before us in our dreams. God keeps alive good in the world; but, look where we will, evil is not far off, to trouble and hinder and spoil. So this chapter has its dark side and its bright side. The plague is removed, and the plague is inflicted. The Captain of the Syrian King confesses God; the servant of the Prophet does all he can to dishonour God. There is noble disinterestedness exhibited at one moment, when the man who lives upon Providence disdains the gold that was freely offered, and immediately afterwards the same gold is earned at the cost of a lie glibly and boldly told by a cunning knave. This glaring sin is our subject for this morning, and though it has some aggravations of its own, and we never think to sin exactly as Gehazi did, we shall find the narrative supplying some useful admonitions for more enlightened times.

Mark, then, this man's first lie was very ingenious. Before Naaman had gone far upon his journey, he is overtaken by the Prophet's servant, and told that an unexpected emergency has arisen which would make a small present welcome though it had just been declined. "Some guests have arrived at our house, since you left it," says Gehazi, breathless almost with haste; "two sons of the Prophets are come to my master's house, and he bids me beg something out of your store for their entertainment,—just a talent of silver, and a change of garment for each of them." What could be more likely? Whither should sons of the Prophets come but to him who was chief among the Prophets? and though Elisha was contented with scanty fare, and coveted no man's silver or gold, what more natural than that he should wish to be a generous host when a message sent after Naaman was sure not to be resented angrily, but taken kindly? This doubtless veiled the sin in Gehazi's eyes. "Where was the fraud, if the Syrian would rather part with the money than keep it? He would travel not only with a lighter load, but with a lighter heart; and if he, a poor, working man, living by his wits, were a little enriched that day, and his master's character not compromised, who then was the sufferer? If all were well pleased and satisfied, who could reasonably be charged with guilt?"

Very plausible reasoning, certainly. *None were harmed.* Naaman, doubtless, never heard of the fraud, and therefore never felt aggrieved by it. As he doubled the money gift that is asked for, and sent back *two* talents of silver instead of *one*, we see that it was generosity and gratitude, not mere formal courtesy, that had dictated the previous offer. When Gehazi returned to the house, and hid his treasure in some private place, he was the richer and the happier, and none were the poorer; but it was a wicked fraud, notwithstanding, and God marked it by a signal punishment.

Gehazi's next lie, we may go on to observe, was very bold. "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" his master asks him, when he had just been putting away his ill-gotten treasure. "Thy servant went no whither," was his ready answer; and that to the Lord's Prophet. He was well acquainted with Elisha's character. He had witnessed some of Elisha's miracles. He knew that wisdom was given him beyond human wisdom, and that power was wielded by him beyond human power. Yet there he stands, either hoping to escape detection, or else thinking, perhaps, as wicked men do so often, that one step forwards would plunge him no deeper in guilt, and that even a minute's respite was well worth purchasing with a second lie. It was useless, however, in his case, to try to deceive the Prophet, as it is useless, in all cases, to try to deceive Him Whom the Prophet served. The reply shows us that there was no relenting in Gehazi's false, covetous heart,—that he did not recover himself, and make confession, when he might have done so,—that he was possessed with the spirit of evil, and ripe for judgment. And so judgment came,—came suddenly,—came terribly,—came so that never, while he lived, could he forget his sin for a single day,—came so that he was a spectacle and a warning to all who knew his story, and even his children's children were made to inherit their father's shame.

There are seven things, saith the Wise Man, which the Lord hateth; and the three which stand at the head of the list, are "a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood." We think too lightly of the first and the second. Heathen men, we know, lie without fear or shame; but we have much to learn, and much to be ashamed of, in this Christian land. We hear strange things about the rarity of downright honesty in the transactions of Commerce. Customers lies are tolerated and excused far too much in society. If one gained the Saviour's commendation, in ancient days, as an Israelite indeed, because he was without guile, men do not reflect enough that to be a Christian indeed can imply no less. Much, we fear, has to be done in our Christian parishes, and

among our Christian congregations, to convict this class of offenders, and bring them to repentance, lest they go to that place of torment; and fervently will we pray that the Spirit of Truth may second our poor words, that some among them may find out their sin, before it finds them out, and put it away as an accursed thing.

Two simple reflections will close our subject.

Our first is this,—How widely different are men's judgments respecting the same persons, and the same things, according to their moral standard.

"My master hath spared this Syrian," says Gehazi. That is to say, "What folly to refuse a gift so freely offered! A heathen prince or noble should pay tribute when he comes as a visitor among the chosen people,—as a suitor to the Prophet of the Lord. I need have no scruples about turning such an opportunity to account. It is not yet too late. I have but to ask for a present in my master's name, and the stranger will be glad to give it." Elisha had higher aims. He knew what it became him to do, as one entrusted with a high commission, and called to sacred duties. To seem to sell a cure would tarnish his name, and bring his office into contempt. None should ever say, in Samaria or Syria, that he was greedy of gain. God had sent Naaman a precious gift; for himself, he did but hand on the message, and point towards Jordan; and from none but his Heavenly Master will he accept fee or reward. So opposite in character are these two men; yet they dwelt in one home, were instructed in the same holy law, and offered their prayers alike to the God of Israel. *One* was a worldling, and thought that he should be generous and self-denying to no purpose,—doing himself a wrong, in fact, and acting the fool's part,—if he did not get the talent of silver which Naaman would rather part with than keep. *The other* lived in a higher world, coveted better treasures, and had learnt to despise as dirt and rubbish all of this world's wealth that could not be had without some sacrifice of conscience or loss of character.

Remember these men stand before us as representatives of the two great classes into which the world is divided,—the men who serve God, and the men who serve Mammon. The *last* do not understand the *first*. They taunt them often as simple for this world,—as not quick-sighted enough for their own interests,—as over-sensitive and absurdly scrupulous in money transactions,—as acting upon rules too strict, and appealing to motives too elevated for a vulgar, money-making world like ours. "*Be it so,*" let us learn to answer; "we will spare men *by the hundred* rather than take an unfair advantage of *one*. *Be it so;* we know we cannot be as wise as the children of this world in our schemings and bargainings, and be guileless, outspoken, truth-loving children of the day" besides. *Be it so;* men may pass us in the race for fame and wealth; we heed it not, so that we are kept by God's mercy in the course of Christian uprightness and liberality, having our treasure safe in heavenly keeping, and our higher life "hid with Christ in God."

There is one other reflection suggested by this story,—It is very dangerous to live near the light without learning to love the way of holiness.

Gehazi, we see, was a very bad man *at last*; we do not know what he was *at first*. He lived in a Prophet's house, and might have learnt more than common Israelites. He turned away his ear from instruction, grew harder, probably, and more selfish as years ran out, and has a name that is marked for infamy while the world lasts.

There is a warning here for men who know something of the Gospel, and are convicted in their own consciences, but who put off the day of repentance to a more convenient season, or think that the confessions or prayers of a last sickness will make all straight between them and God. There is a yet more solemn warning for those who live near to any faithful servants of Christ, see plainly that their religion is a thing of reality, and confess in their better moods that they feel humbled by the contrast, and yet do nothing towards a better life, vaguely hoping that their time of conversion will come some day, and mocking God meanwhile with cold formal prayers which get no answer.

That time may come, or it may never come. We pry not into God's counsels, and can set no limits to His mercy. You may live to be an old man, and then wake up to carry a double burden of sin and shame, and take your place with sorrow and self-upbraiding amongst the babes of God's family. Or you may be cut down in middle life, and go out of the world, as more than half your neighbours do, hoping to be saved they know not why, with no relents of conscience, and no signs of faith. But of this be sure, that, as months run on, you stand not still. No man fights against conscience without loss and danger to his soul. The light, which you see and do not follow, will wax more dim. Of this be sure, that, as the good Spirit strives with you at your praying

times, and makes plain truths from the preacher's lips pierce like a sharp two-edged sword,—so the Spirit of Evil, who was a Liar from the beginning, is darkening your mind while the contest goes on, blunting your moral sensibilities, and preparing you for the last fatal decision, that of meeting God's plain warnings with a flat denial, and saying that the world's easy, accommodating, time-serving, self-pleasing Religion will do for you.

May God in His mercy keep us from that peace! for it is like the sleep of death. May we walk in the open daylight of Truth, neither believing lies, nor speaking lies! Yea, may we be followers of Him Who is the Truth itself; and whether we be called to some post of eminence, like Elisha, or, like the little maid, are amongst the meanest of God's children, may we faithfully confess Christ's name, "having our loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."

Hazael

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog," etc.—2 Kings viii. 13.

The first mention of Hazael is in 1 Kings xix. 15, where we are told that Elijah after his return from Horeb anointed him to be king.

The next time he is spoken of it is as a Prime Minister to the king of Syria, and a messenger sent to the Prophet. Strangely enough Benhadad sends to make enquiry of one who is a servant of the God repudiated by his own nation. The king wishes to know whether he will recover from his illness. He sends a present by the hand of Hazael. The latter took care that it should be a "large" one. Some selfish design was detected therein by the Prophet. The messenger and the Prophet meet in a street of Damascus beneath the shade of the trees of one of the many gardens, for which the city has always been celebrated. The Prophet in reply to the enquiry says, that Benhadad may, in the ordinary course of things, recover, but he soon sees that a fatal end is at hand; he suspects a sinister design in the messenger. He settles his face steadily. It is so fixed that Hazael can note the overpowering of the prophetic power. Shuddering awe steals over the Prophet. Tears begin to flow down the cheeks, but no word comes from the lips. A vision is before Elisha's eyes. Hazael waits. At length he asks, "Why weepeth my lord?" Then the Prophet foretells what Hazael himself will do, desolating lands and destroying the defenceless. Hazael exclaims, "Am I a dog, that I should do this great thing?"—meaning either that he was not so low down as to do such evil, or that he, a mere dog, could not accomplish so much. This in harmony with the revised rendering. The probable intention was to repudiate the opinion formed of him by the Prophet as being evil and unworthy. He half suspected the tears had reference to the evil he would do, and yet he seems not to have acknowledged to himself how powerful were the germs of evil in him for working wrong to others, and especially how treacherous were his secret plottings against the king.

The wicked propensities in our hearts are oft hidden from us. We are ignorant of the capabilities for evil and for good that lie in us. Hazael knew not his own heart. He would not have acknowledged that he was so ambitious, unscrupulous, or murderous. We have all a realm of mystery within. There are many offshoots in the dark passages of the heart. Few dare to lift the thick veil that hangs over some of them. We have secret rooms, only revealed by the moving of sliding panels. The panels are sometimes not easily distinguishable. We are deceived in ourselves. We are not born utterly depraved, but our natures, like a silent machine, turn out incessantly sins of various shades and degrees of enormity. There are, amid the germs of goodness, so many of evil, and we are ignorant of how swiftly the latter may sprout and kill the former.

One piece of ploughed ground in winter appears as brown and free from weeds as another but let the rains descend and the spring sunshine rest upon it, then up will come the weeds choking the young crop of grain. So with hearts. One man may be like another for a time, but soon circumstances will show what evil is hidden in the soul of one and goodness developed in the other. Both may be ignorant of what can be developed. Irwine, the commonsense vicar, said to his former pupil Donnthorne:

—"A man can never do anything at variance with his own nature. He carries with him the germs of his most exceptional action; and if we wise people make eminent fools of ourselves on any particular occasion, we must endure the legitimate conclusion that we carry a few grains of folly to our ounce of wisdom."

"Well, one may be betrayed," said Arthur Donnithorne, "into doing things by a combination of circumstances which one might never have done otherwise."

"Why, yes, a man cannot very well steal a bank-note, unless the bank-note lies within convenient reach, but he won't make us think him an honest man because he begins to howl at the bank-note for falling in his way."

"But surely you don't think a man who struggles against a temptation, into which he falls at last, as bad as the man who never struggles at all?"

"No, certainly, I pity him in proportion to his struggles, for they foreshadow the inward suffering which is the worst form of Nemesis. Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences quite apart from any fluctuations that went before—consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves. And it is best to fix our minds on that certainty instead of considering what may be the elements of excuse for us."

If certain evils existent in germs in our souls were revealed we should possibly deny their presence. We are like Hazael unwilling to have a poor or bad opinion of ourselves. We see our portrait reflected in the camera, but we go away and "straightway" forget what manner of men we are. That amiable-looking boy at school would repudiate the possibility of his ever breaking a mother's heart by his wildness and gambling. That proud bridegroom would repudiate the possibility of his ever speaking harshly or treating brutally that trusting, orange-blossom-crowned girl whose rounded arm rests on his, and whose full eyes reflect his love. The "I will cherish" becomes at times the "I have crushed." That cultured man, noble in mien and lofty in position, would repudiate the suggestion that his little weakness would one day bring him down to the level of the poor fellow, who with tattered garb and blotched face hangs round the corner public waiting to earn a copper by holding a horse. We have, however, seen such sad transformations. That one who to-day despises the low pleasures, the petty ambitions, the wretched social struggles for prominence, to-morrow joins the "madding crowd." That one who to-day, being poor, rails at the rich, after a time becoming prosperous, becomes also niggardly, close-fisted, mean. That one whom you would regard as the soul of honour is doing backstair work and either giving or taking bribes. Men often repudiate the very thing that afterwards corrupts them, and when they are corrupted repudiate the fact. It was said by Southey that "Robespierre would have recoiled with horror if the crimes of the first French Revolution could have been revealed to him a few years before." So Hazael would not at one time have thought it possible that ever he who had been so trusted, honoured, and rewarded by the king, would act treacherously towards him, and yet when the king was alone, weak, ill, prostrate, Hazael went in professedly interested in his health, but took a wet cloth, bent over him, stopped his breath and played the mean assassin. Then he went forth with calm, hypocritical countenance to summon helpers to the dead king; nor told he how the king died. Through his dastardly crime he reached a throne.

Circumstances are so powerful in developing changes of mind we little conceived. The evil course we enter upon is like getting on a trolley on the inclined plane; if we once lose power over it, we go rushing down to destruction at a rate constantly accelerated.

All the hidden sin of the soul can be revealed by God. Elisha was enabled to reveal Hazael to himself. God gave him the power. God's knowledge of us is not the result of observation and judgment, as man gains knowledge of his fellow, but is absolute knowledge. Christ when on earth needed not that any should testify of men for He "knew what was in man." Without attempting to prove to men that they were sinners, He held up the torch of truth before the conscience and made men convict themselves, as when Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," or when the young ruler went away sadly because he had great possessions; or when accusers of a weak woman slunk away from Him Who said "He that is without sin let him cast the first stone at her." As a skilful musician can place his fingers on the keys and bring out sweetest music or reveal the defects of the instrument, so Christ touched the human soul and revealed its hidden truth or sounded its discordant notes. He shows us that to be sinful is bad enough, but that to be hardened and unabashed therein is frightful. Moreover Christ not only reveals the state of the heart in the present, but its action in

respect to our destiny. We should welcome such revealing, in the spirit of that aged jarl who spoke at Godmundham in Yorkshire twelve hundred years ago. The good missionary Paulinus had come to introduce Christianity. A meeting was held in a rude building to discuss the project of Paulinus. King Edwin presided. Priests and soldiers were in the great Saxon Hall. A fire was kindled in the centre. Winter made men welcome the warmth diffused. A poor bird also driven in by stress of weather flew in at one side among the rafters, and hovered for awhile, then passed out at the opposite side of the building. Then rose up the aged jarl and said, "Oh King, I have thought that the life of man is like that sparrow; it came, we know not when it came; it goes, we know not whither it goes; If the teacher can tell us whence we came and whither we are going, O King, let us hear him!"

Christ can lift the veil. He shows us our state, and that the present state is the germ of the future destiny.

When the sinful state is revealed, alas, warning is not always taken. Hazeal should have taken the words of the Prophet as an intimation that he was to be merciful to others and to himself. But however he may shake and shudder at the image of himself presented, he turns not away from the evil. The "means to do ill deed made ill deeds done." The very day after his interview with the rebukeful Prophet, at eventide, he carried out the murderous thought that may long have been hatching in his mind. He can brook no further delay. The death of the King must be for him assured. With hand over the mouth, and knee on the chest of Benhadad, Hazeal goes into the ranks of murderers. Then he became a ravaging tyrant. "He smote them in all the coasts of Israel" (2 Kings x. 32); then he made a raid on Jerusalem and took away the hallowed things (xii. 17); then he "oppressed" Israel so severely that the Lord gave them a saviour (xiii. 4, 5). This man said "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" or (R. V.), "But what is thy servant, which is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He speaks of himself as a dog, but he thinks of himself as a lion. Doubtless he gloried in the suggestion that he would harass Israel but he accepted not the warning. With an air of mingled innocence and injury, yet with suppressed exultation, he utters the equivocal words, "But what is thy servant, which is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?"

Every man has need to be watchful. The cable is not stronger than the weakest link, nor the character than the hidden meanness. The secret sin does not grow in a day though it may germinate in a moment. A Scotch preacher beautifully illustrated this by referring to the tiny seed dropped by the passing bird into a crevice of a rock, and which, sprouting, grew, and in process of years by its mighty roots moved the massive rock until it toppled over into the loch. So we must beware of the trifling thought of sin. We must search by the power of God's Spirit. Let us be sincere in the searching and firm in the eviction of the hidden evil. Is it evil temper, cheating, backbiting, murdering character, sly tippling or open drunkenness, harshness and cruelty? Away with it in God's strength.

Jehoram

BY REV. DAVID THOMAS, D.D.

"Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign," etc.—2 Kings viii. 17-24.

This is a short fragment of a king's history, the history of Jehoram. Brief as it is, it contains many practical truths.

I. PIETY IS NOT NECESSARILY HEREDITARY.

Parents as a rule, transmit their physical and intellectual qualities to their children, but not their moral characters. Jehoram was a bad man and a wicked king, but he was the son of Jehoshaphat, who was a man of distinguished piety, and reigned wisely and beneficently over Israel for twenty-five years. Of him it was said that "the more his riches and honour increased, the more his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord" (2 Chron. xvii. 5, 6). He caused the altars and places of idolatry to be destroyed, and the knowledge of the Lord to be diffused throughout the kingdom, and the places of ecclesiastical and judicial authority (2 Chron. xvi. 9). But how different was his son! One of the first acts of his government was to put to death his six brothers, and several

of the leading men of the empire. It is here said that "he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab." He regulated his conduct by the infamous "house of Ahab," and not by the religious house of his father. He was in truth a murderer, an idolator, and a persecutor. But whilst piety is not *necessarily* hereditary, a rule some defect may be traced to parental conduct. Even in the life of Jehoshaphat, we detect at least two parental defects. First: In permitting his son to form unholy alliances. This good man, Jehoshaphat, formed a league with Ahab, against Ramoth-gilead, contrary to the counsel of Micaiah (2 Chron. xviii.). For this Jehu censured him severely. In consequence of this alliance his son married the daughter of this infamous Ahab, and the matrimonial connection with such a woman, idolatrous, corrupt, and the daughter of Jezebel, had, no doubt, a powerful influence in deteriorating his moral character. Another parental defect in Jehoshaphat was—Secondly: In granting his son too great an indulgence. He raised him to the throne during his own lifetime. He took him into royal partnership too soon, and thus supplied him with abundant means to foster his vanity and ambition. Ah me! how many parents ruin their children for ever by over indulgence.

II. IMMORAL KINGS ARE NATIONAL CURSES.

What evils this man brought upon his country! It is said that "in his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him: and he rose by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him about, and the captains of the chariots: and the people fled into their tents," &c. Through him the kingdom of Judah lost Edom (which had been its tributary for 150 years), which "revolted" and became the determined enemy of Judah ever afterwards (Psa. cxxxvii. 7). Libnah, too, "revolted at the same time." This was a city in the south-western part of Judah assigned to the priests, and a city of refuge. But these revolts are but specimens of the tremendous evils that this immoral man brought upon the kingdom. It has always been so. Wicked kings, in all ages, have been the greatest curses that have afflicted the race. God said to Israel of old, "I gave thee a king in Mine anger" (Hosea xiii. 11). And the gift, on the whole, it must be confessed, has been a curse to mankind: and that because few men who have attained the position have been divinely royal in intellect, in heart, in thoughts, in aims, in sympathies. What does Heaven say of wicked kings? "As a roaring lion, and a raging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." When will the world have true kings; such a king as is described in the Book of Proverbs, as one "that sitteth in the throne of judgment" and who "scattereth away all evil with his eyes"? He is one who sees justice done. He does not rule for the interest of a class, but for the good of all. His laws are equitable. Partialities and predilections which govern plebeian souls have no sway over him.

He's a king,

A true right king, that dare do aught save wrong,
Fears nothing mortal but to be unjust;
Who is not blown up with the flattering puffs
Of spongy sycophants: who stands unmoved
Despite the jostling of opinion.

III. DEATH IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS.

1. Death does not respect a man's position, however high. "And Jehoram slept with his fathers and was buried." Jehoram was a King, yet death struck him down, and he "was buried with his fathers." Palaces are as accessible to death as paupers' huts. Attempted resistance in the former, however skilfully organised, would be as futile as in the latter. Death cares nothing for kings; crowns, diadems, sceptres, courtiers, and pompous pageantries are only as dust in his icy glance.

2. Death does not respect a man's character however vile. Jehoram was a bad man, and utterly unfit to die: but death waits not for moral preparation. When we remember what evils wicked men, especially wicked kings, work in the world, death must be regarded as a beneficent messenger. The Psalmist saw mercy in the destruction of despots. He "overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: for His mercy endureth

for ever." "To Him Who smote great kings, and slew famous kings: for His mercy endureth for ever." (Psa. cxxxvi.). There is mercy for the race in their destruction. When such demons in human flesh are cut down, the world breathes more freely, a load is rolled from its heart, obstacles are swept from its path of progress. When the Pharaohs are overwhelmed, the human Israel can march on to promised lands.

Jehu

BY REV. J. LAWRELL, M.A.

"Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord."—2 Kings x. 16.

It is an excellent thing to have zeal, but it is not well to talk about it. Many of the servants of God were men remarkable for their energy and earnestness in His service, and one would always see and hear of it with admiration, but modesty of character would hinder those who possessed these qualifications from talking about them. One feels inclined to question the zeal of those who say they are zealous; it should be shown in the life, not talked about with the lips.

This it is which strikes one in the history of Jehu. It was quite right that he should be zealous. The enemies of the Lord of Hosts were to be destroyed: the remnant of the house of Ahab were to be slain. He had received a commission, and was fulfilling it. We read with pleasure of his meeting with Jehonadab the son of Rechab,—of his question, "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?"—of the answer of Jehonadab, "It is,"—and of the sequel, "If it be, give me thine hand: and he gave him his hand; and he took him up into the chariot."

But a feeling of disappointment arises when we find, in the words which follow, the mixed and selfish motive of Jehu, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." It at once taints the purity of the motive. It casts a doubt on all the character of the man. Why should he say, "Come and see my zeal"? Why not be zealous, and silent? Why hold up his own earnestness and activity for the admiration of Jehonadab? How far better had he been simply zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and let his actions speak for themselves!

Not only was the display of Jehu's zeal evil in itself, but it had a tendency to produce the contrary evil of lukewarmness in others. From the faultiness of Jehu's character many may be inclined to say, that, "after all, there is a good deal of showing-off in these zealous persons"; that, for their own part, they had rather do things quietly; and the effect is that they fall into a state of easy indifference, and let life pass away without accomplishing any thing.

On these two opposite errors I purpose to say a few words, as each has its peculiar dangers, and so will need its peculiar safeguards.

I. IT IS NEEDFUL TO WARN AGAINST INDIFFERENCE, because so many persons hear the great truths set forth in the Word of God so often, that they become insensible to their greatness.

1. For instance, how often we meet with those who do not renounce, yet do not seriously believe, *the doctrines of the Gospel*; who have perfectly learned by heart, and can now repeat the answer in the Church Catechism, "First, I learn to believe in God the Father," &c., and yet are not influenced by these simple yet stupendous truths: who do not recognize the great love of God in Creation, the making all out of nothing, the gradual unfolding of His power, the calling into being by His own will time, space, light, air, sea, dry land, peopling the world with animal life, and finally creating man in His own image!—Persons in whom the thought of redeeming love produces no thrill, who doubt not the story of Jesus, His Divine nature, His becoming man, His dying on the Cross, His Resurrection from the dead, but who can stand on the mount of Transfiguration and can see no light,—who can be present at Calvary and perceive no darkness,—to whom the life of Jesus is no model, and the death of Jesus is no Sacrifice!—Who will not deny that the Holy Ghost is a Person and not an office, but who do not ask daily for fresh supplies of His grace,—to whom sanctification is no more than a sound,—who begin the day and end the day without one prayer to God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, to have mercy on them—miserable sinners as they are—

who eat and drink, and buy and sell, and work and rest, without one fear of indwelling sin, or one thought of the indwelling Spirit of God !

2 As with the doctrines, so with the *precepts of the Gospel*. How many there are who rather admire the morality of the Gospel, yet do not, in any adequate sense, seek to obey the commandments of God. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," is the saying of One Who thereby makes obedience the test of love. Those indifferent persons of whom I am speaking profess the love, but think the obedience entirely beyond them. And what are these commandments of which Jesus speaks, but rules from God which should regulate the whole of daily life—our duty to God, our duty to our neighbour, and therefore a watchfulness and restraint over ourselves; rules given not only for a few who try to live lives of the highest saintliness, but rules for the every-day life of the most ordinary men.

"It is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy."—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."—"Take, eat, this is My Body."—"Drink ye all of it," i.e., the cup, are all plain tests of the obedience, and so of the love, of the people of Christ. And yet does not the lukewarmness of the mass require a word of warning on these points? Do all seek to be holy because He is holy? Do all make the manner in which they would wish to be dealt with the measure and the model of their dealing with others? Do all of sufficient age, confirmed, or ready and desirous to be confirmed, crowd around the Table of the Lord? With a ready obedience and an overflowing love do they press forward to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup? Or are the majority of persons indifferent to these commands, shunning this Holy Sacrament, careless of their privilege, neglecting His command? Alas! for the answer that must be given in regard to most of those who profess and call themselves Christians!

3. As with the precepts, so with the *promises of the Gospel*. Pain and sorrow, sickness and bereavement, surround us on all sides: and yet how seldom comparatively do we find persons hopefully reliant on the promises contained in the Word of God. There is no absolute despair, but a chilling indifference to all around them. They see, they cannot but see, the sad dispensation; but of the cheerful submission to the will of God they know nothing.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Full of sympathy as this saying is for the weary and sorrowful sons of men, yet it has no meaning to those who are so indifferent. They go on bearing the burden laid on them by the world; they heed not the invitation of Him, Who would have them lay that burden at the foot of His Cross.

"In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." This brings to them but a small sense of His love and care for souls. It is possible, they seem to say, that there shall be happiness beyond the grave; but to them it is distant and uncertain. They have no growing hope of reunion with Christ, no movement of the heart, when He says "that where I am, ye may be also"; no piercing with the eye of faith through the darkness of the grave, and beholding what is invisible to the natural eye, in the glorious light of a promised immortality.

This indifference runs through the whole of what ought to be their religious life. They admit the importance, but do not feel the reality, of Christianity itself. Prayer becomes at best a formal repetition of words. They do not feel that they are addressing real words to be heard by a present God, but rather look on prayer as a duty to be discharged, and in the neglect of which there would be some amount of blame. They do not refuse to give alms, but they give as little, and as seldom, as they can. They do not entirely forsake the House of God, but the attendance on public worship is neither regular nor devout. Of the Lord's Supper I say nothing here, as persons so indifferent to their general spiritual welfare, can hardly, I fear, be expected to be found among those who come for the nourishment of the Divine life which God promises and provides in that Holy Sacrament.

Such persons have need to be most affectionately warned against the danger they are in, striving as they are after no element of good,—offering so little opposition to the influence of evil,—preferring what is popular to what is right,—and allowing the poor example of others to be their standard of what is good and true, instead of seeking for that standard where alone it can really be found, in the revealed will of God.

They have need to be warned because the evil is so subtle. No great crime can be brought against them, no glaring fault at once proves them self-condemned. They cry,

"Lord, Lord," but they do not the will of their Father Who is in Heaven. They speak with Jacob's voice, but on near approach we find that they have the hands of Esau. The heart is untouched by the power of the Holy Spirit, their strength is failing them,—their light is dim,—their life is without energy. Oh! one word of warning for such! as whither but to final rejection are they drifting, who have a weak faith, a feeble hope, and a cold charity? "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot." Any thing, it would seem, is better than a lukewarm indifference.

II. BUT I AM ALLOWED TO GIVE A CAUTION CONCERNING ZEAL. Before I do so, I may say that zeal in its true sense forms a necessary part of the religious character. You will see this at once when I tell you that it means warmth, fervour, ardour. The caution I wish to give is against a misapplied zeal, or a zeal like that of Jehu, when he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." Jehu seems to have been thinking very much more of himself in the display of this energetic service, than of the Master for Whom that service was to be performed. One of our best English writers has said, "There is nothing in which men more deceive themselves than in that which the world calls zeal. There are so many passions which hide themselves under it, and so many mischiefs arising from it, that some have gone so far as to say, it would have been for the benefit of mankind if it had never been reckoned in the catalogue of virtues." This, you will understand, relates to an ill-regulated zeal, when it has not for its first and most simple object the glory of God; when it does not spring from a love of Christ, and when it is not prompted by the living warmth of the Holy Spirit.

It relates to a zeal, for instance, like that of Jehu, which was ostentatious or for show, not agreeing with the wise man, who says, "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth: a stranger, and not thine own lips." Our Lord reproves this outward showy zeal when He says, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them." "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast." In all these cases our Lord says, "Verily they have their reward,"—not the reward they seek, but the reward they deserve.

Zeal, again, is not worth much if it merely arises now and then, on some sudden emergency, and when it forms no part of the regular and daily Christian life. A want of perseverance takes a good deal off the value of this virtue. The rich young man in the Gospel was doubtless desirous of becoming a disciple of Jesus, when he came to ask Him, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and so far as the commandments of the second table of the Law went, he could say that he had kept them; but when his zeal for the service of God was tested by the further requirement that he should sell all that he had, and distribute to the poor, it failed him: up to a certain point he was zealous in the cause of Christ; but the treasure in Heaven was not enough to satisfy him, and the following Christ fully was beyond that which he was prepared to do. "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."

Or, again, need I tell you that that zeal which is only partial finds no favour in the sight of God:—a zeal in public, when a Jehonadab is standing by to see it; and no zeal for God in private, when the heart is alone with God, when no human eye can see, and no human lip give praise. "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," was the outward visible life of Jehu; cast your eye down the chapter, and you will soon find what was the inner or hidden life of this same man. "Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to with, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan." "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin." Such on the one side was the profession, and such on the other was the practice, of Jehu!

But let me exhort you to be zealous in the cause of God. Be zealous for His truth, and be zealous for His Church. Let not a cold, damp indifference creep over you, chilling every effort, and hindering you from Christian labour in whatsoever form it may present itself to you.

Set before yourselves for imitation, the zeal of Peter; the zeal of one ever foremost in proclaiming truth; in being bold on the Lord's side; in throwing himself forward in time of danger; and who was first in making confession of the truth. A zeal, after the Resurrection, how faithful in preaching the Gospel, how powerful in converting to the

faith! A zeal which taught him to obey God rather than men; and which at length led him to the martyr's cross.

Set before yourselves for imitation the zeal of Paul; a zeal to be described only in the language which he learned of the Holy Spirit. "In labours more abundant; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." That zeal which patience enabled him to keep constantly kindled; which afflictions could not extinguish; which necessities could not starve out; which distresses could not overcome! That zeal which stripes and imprisonments, tumults and labours, watchings and fastings, all came in turn and tried to quench, but which remained in him shining brightly to the last, because it was a zeal such as is possible under the New Dispensation—a zeal which was animated by faith, and which wrought by love!

With hearts full of reverence, set before yourselves the example of Him, of Whom it is said, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up." He is the great Pattern in all human life. His time was spent in the service of His Heavenly Father, and in doing good to the souls and bodies of men. His unceasing toil, His unfailing love, the kindness of His words, the extent of His sympathy, all point Him out as the "ensample of holy life." Or follow Him to the lonely hill side; be with Him as He kneels in the garden of Gethsemane; learn something of His secret zeal for the glory of God, in the utterance of the heart in prayer to His Holy Father; as He entrusted His own almost fainting spirit to the charge of One Who could give succour from Heaven: as He besought Him, that, if it were possible, the cup might pass away from Him, and when it behoved Him to drink it, drank it to the dregs.

Be very zealous for *the doctrines of the Gospel*; do not remain satisfied with half the truth when you may have the whole of it: do not let any one maim or cripple the truth for you: let no one cut any thing out of the Creed, as though it were unnecessary or untrue. Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints: the faith revealed by God, enshrined in the Creeds, and handed down to us by the Church.

Be very zealous for *the precepts of the Gospel*. Strive always to find out what is the law of God, and, having found out, obey it. Seek not to have the zeal of Jehu in displaying your obedience, but rather the zeal of Jehonadab in keeping the commands given to him. Remember that as, in relation to the doctrines of the Gospel, your covenanted promise is to "believe all the articles of the Christian faith," so in relation to the precepts of the Gospel, it is "to keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of your life."

And lastly, be very zealous for *the promises of the Gospel*. You cannot expect to understand, or to be a partaker of, those promises unless you are living under the guidance of God the Holy Ghost. Be very earnest in prayer: be very regular in your attendance at the House of God: be very frequent in Communion, so that, in being zealous for God, your zeal itself may be quickened in your acts of devotion. And though you may call to none to see your zeal for the Lord, it may be seen by the eye of Him from Whom no secrets are hid; and, as being for His glory, may be noted with joy in the book of the recording Angel.

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." Have a zeal of God, and let it be according to knowledge.

Joash

BY VEN. JAMES RANDALL, M.A.

"*Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord,*" etc.—2 Chronicles xxiv. 2.

The early life of Joash was passed under circumstances seemingly the most favourable to his establishment in godliness. Snatched in his infancy from the murderous hands of his wicked grandmother, by what we can scarcely regard as less than a special providence of God, to keep alive, according to His promise, a lamp in the house of His servant David; hid for six years in the house of the Lord, finding there an asylum among the priests, who as a garrison in a besieged fortress kept up the worship of Jehovah, all the more dear to them, because they only seemed to be the depositaries of the true faith, while idolatry triumphed throughout the rest of the land; nourished by

the faithful Jehoiada and his wife with all the care that was due to the hope of Israel, the destined ancestor, according to the flesh, of the Son of God, and that at the hazard of their own lives, which, as well as his, might have been sacrificed at any moment by an unlucky discovery of his existence to the queen; fed with the sacrifices of God's altar, amid the prayers and tears of those who had no hope of safety from day to day for him or for themselves, except in their reliance upon that unchangeable word, "I have sworn once by My holiness, that I will not fail David"; surely one would have thought that the very mind and body of Joash must have been a temple, purified and meet for a constant habitation of the Holy Spirit.

And so for a long time it seemed to be. "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest"; all the remaining days of that long life, extended by the mercy of God towards His people, to the unusual term of a hundred and thirty years, that the ruins of the temple might be repaired, and still more, that the breaches of the people's allegiance to their God might be reconciled. And then Jehoiada died, and then it seemed as if with him the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Joash. For, "after the death of Jehoiada, came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance unto the king. Then the king hearkened unto them; and they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols." Sad change, indeed! that he who in his childhood had found his safety only under the shadow of Jehovah's wing, should in his age have deserted Him, and passed over to the camp of His enemies. Then followed the usual consequence of grace rejected, and sin admitted to take possession of the heart, hatred of the reprover of sin. "The Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, He also hath forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the Lord. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son."

The ingratitude of this act strikes one at the first glance as monstrous. And yet, though I would not suppose that ingratitude often reaches so high a pitch as this, I fear the disposition to resent as an injury, not only the direct reproof in words, but even the indirect reproof of the continued holy life of former friends, from community with whom in religious feeling a sinner has cut himself off, is but too common. Think of this; for it is a great test of what may have been, or may be now, your own spiritual state. If you have formerly lived and walked in the house of God, as friends, with those whose holiness, once your joy, is now felt by you to be a reproach to your own profligacy or worldliness; if you no longer delight in their company or conversation, though you know in your conscience, that not they, but you are changed; if you can with satisfaction hear their good evil-spoken of; still more, if you can yourselves join in ridiculing their weakness or peculiarities, suggesting that they are probably not so good, and certainly not so wise, as they would seem to be; then you are already gone a great way toward the sin of Joash.

I will add, that this is a sin to which young persons are especially liable to be tempted at their first entrance into what we call *the world*. If they have had the happiness to live hitherto under religious restraint, and in the society of good people, they are to a considerable extent in the condition of our first parents in paradise, ignorant of evil: but the world spreads out evil before them, and the tempter presents it under the most attractive forms, and disguises all its really repulsive features. Too often they fail under the temptation. They lose the trusting simplicity of their young faith, the tender delicacy of their young conscience, and then they affect to despise and triumph over those who have kept the jewels that they themselves have suffered to be stolen away. They would gladly initiate their early friends in the mystery of the evil which they have learned; but the friends who will not yield to their guidance, nor follow their example, will commonly be treated by them as enemies to their pleasure, and be made outcasts from their affection.

Consider, then, how you stand disposed towards those whom you once honoured and loved for their goodness. Do you love and honour them still, though you know that you have forfeited, or deserved to forfeit, their esteem? Cherish these feelings; go back to those friends, and walk with them, as in times past, in the good old ways. But if you feel that you cannot love them as heretofore; that you are too far gone in other paths to turn again into that which they are treading, remember Joash and Zechariah;

remember the blood of the faithful prophet, and true friend and counsellor, spilt by the command of his foster-brother; and know that you are giving place in your heart to that same choice of evil rather than good, that same love of the world and the worldly-minded, in preference to the love of God and the children of God, which sank Joash to that depth of sin.

But though this is a very important, it is not the most important, lesson to be learned from this history. That lesson is, the duty of training ourselves, and those who are under our guidance, to stand alone, and not to rest upon the support of others. Alone, I mean, as to men; but not alone as to God. Rather, the more we are alone as to men, the more we shall feel the necessity and comfort of being always with Him.

Not that we should make small account of the counsel of wise and religious friends, and especially when those friends have also the authority which belongs to the ministers of God. Such counsel is of inestimable value; it is a precious gift of God to those whom He has placed in circumstances enabling them to receive and profit by it. There are two errors in this matter. On the one hand, there is the reluctance to seek religious counsel, especially from the clergy, who by their office are bound to impart it, and who, I must say, are generally ready to do so, and are grieved that those under their charge are so rarely willing to avail themselves of it, when they might very often, by even a few minutes of pastoral conversation, have their course of duty made clear to their minds, and be saved the distress of doubting before they act, and the fear, after they have acted, of having done wrong. Instances are but too common, in which, for want of such previous confidence, people have plunged themselves irrecoverably into spiritual difficulties, which have beset them for all their after-lives. The other error, of which the history before us presents so sad an example, is that of always looking to the opinion of others, and putting aside the responsibility of deciding for ourselves. The perfect use of a wise adviser is not to determine for us what we shall do in every particular case that day by day arises; but to help us to store our minds with sound principles, such as we may call up for our own direction when any emergency requires them. Whether in this respect Jehoiada's management of the early life of Joash had been defective; whether he had thought it sufficient to tell his pupil what he ought to do, and see that it was done, without training him to discern between good and evil by the exercise of his own understanding, enlightened as it should have been, under Jehoiada's teaching, by the study of the Word of God and prayer; or whether the fault was in the constitution of the pupil's mind, easy to receive any impression from those about him, and too weak to hold fast that which was good, we cannot tell.

It would rather appear, however, that the latter was the case. We can hardly suppose that Joash could have been ignorant of the duty of serving Jehovah only; or that he could have failed to perceive that the princes of Judah were leading him astray from the way in which he had so long walked safely. But he was pliable, and ready to be persuaded. Do we wonder that a person of such gentle and yielding qualities could be guilty of such an atrocious act of violence as the murder of Zechariah? Daily life is full of such instances, in which weak but well-meaning persons have been pushed into wickedness that they would themselves have abhorred, through want of firmness to oppose the will of others. Joash was tried, and found wanting; and his trial was the removal of his faithful counsellor, and the access thereby opened to advisers of a contrary disposition; men in whom there was an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and who allured him in like manner to renounce his faith, and violate every feeling of justice and humanity.

Certainly there is a great difference in the natural constitution of men's minds. Some are like the creeping plant, that grows up rapidly, and yields a fair show of luxuriant leaves, but must always hang for support upon some external prop, holding fast by its tendrils to a trellis or a pole. Others are like the oak, slowly developing itself from among the meaner underwood, but gathering firmness and substance every day till it rears its head alone above the trees of the forest. When the trellis or the pole decays, the creeper must necessarily fall to the ground; the oak abides, seemingly immovable in its own strength. Favourable circumstances may uphold the creeper: it may have attached itself to a castle or a rock. Unfavourable circumstances may lay low the oak: it may be blasted by the lightning, or hewn down by the woodman's axe. But there is the inherent difference of nature to begin with; and all the culture that man could bestow would never give to the creeper the sturdiness of the oak. But though man cannot change nature, God can. He made the waters of the sea to stand on an heap,

that there might be a way through the deep for the ransomed to pass over. He made the blast of the furnace like a moist whistling wind upon the faces of the three holy children, so that there was not a hair of their heads singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire passed on them. And so He can change the heart of man, and impart strength to the weakest character. He can give wisdom to the simple, and courage to the faint-hearted; and manifest His power the most in helping their most seemingly hopeless infirmity.

Therefore the way to be firm in what is good, is to take God for your guide and support, and not man. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" The counsel of good men is most valuable, and to be esteemed as a precious gift of God, and one of the chiefest means by which He enables us to discover and work out His own will. The approbation of good men is one of the most cheering cordials with which God encourages us in our work for Him. But after all, God's counsel is that by which we must abide; His favour that which must be our desired reward. And that is what we must keep in view, if we would have consistent stability of purpose, or steadiness of conduct. No human guide can so enter into our secret thoughts, or be so acquainted with the exact posture of our circumstances, and how these work upon our minds, as to be able always to direct us with certainty. And even if he could do this while he is with us, what is to be our condition when he is separated from us by death, or even by absence? There is but one unfailing and unerring Director, Who is able both to teach us what is good, and to give us power to perform it.

How, then, are we to reconcile these two things, the duty of seeking, and in due measure following, the counsel of our good instructors, of our natural or our spiritual elders, and the duty of standing fast for ourselves in the counsel of God? Is there any real contradiction between them? or can they be brought into such harmonious relation to each other, that we may beneficially fulfil both?

I think we must arrive at the solution of the question in this way. All true knowledge, and wisdom, and prudence, comes from God. Men are in various ways, and in different degrees, His instruments for the conveyance of it to other men. The father to his children, the teacher to his scholars, the priest to his flock, all are, or ought to be, the representatives of God to those who by birth or condition are under their instruction. They ought to be listened to as such; yet always under this limitation, that their office is, so to represent God to us, as to bring us to Him, not to keep us from Him. Just as the office of the moon is to transmit the reflected light of the sun to the dark side of the earth; but if the moon comes between the earth and the sun, it does but darken the earth, by intercepting from it the rays that beam from that great light which is the source of light to both: so the parent, the teacher, or the priest, is to stand for God towards the child, the pupil, or the private Christian, so far as their imperfect knowledge or their spiritual needs require; but not so as to eclipse God, or to make them forget, but on the contrary, to make them anxiously remember that to God, and not to man, they are answerable in the last resort for their deeds. If they are not taught this, they will be perpetually shaping their conduct according to what such a man will think of them; a dangerous ambition even of a good man's praise, considering how uncertain must be the judgment of the best and wisest man concerning another's heart. Such excessive confidence must be a snare both to the guide and to the person guided. To the guide, because it supposes in him, and requires from him, a perfection of discernment which is not granted to man; to the person guided, because it leads him to rest satisfied with approving himself to an inferior judgment, when he ought to be looking to the sentence of the Judge that knoweth all things. Therefore it must be a matter of most careful watchfulness to all those who by nature or office are the spiritual guides to others, to guard against any misunderstanding as to the just limits of their authority, and of the others' deference to it: and to the persons who are, or might and ought to be, under such guidance, whether, on the one hand, they have made the most diligent use of such advantages for knowing the will of God as have been thereby brought within their reach; and whether, on the other hand, they have done what under man's advice has been rightly done by them with a sincere eye to the service of God, and not rather in the desire of pleasing men, though those men should be confessedly wise and good. The more we advance in years and knowledge, the greater must be our vigilance upon this point. We shall never be exempt from the duty of seeking good counsel, as we have opportunity; but it will become our duty to sift the counsel, and try it by the Word of God, and so make it our own, before we commit ourselves to act upon it. The judgment

of good men, and the opinion that they may form of our conduct, is not by any means to be disregarded. Their judgment, due allowance being made for the human infirmity that besets it, is one of the ways by which God teaches us to estimate His own. But then we must bear in mind that they are imperfect, and He the perfect judge; and therefore we must, to the utmost of our power, clear away what is imperfect in their sentence, though it should be in our favour, and judge ourselves according to the perfection of His, though it should be against us. If Jehoiada had been alive, it is not likely that Joash would have consented to the murder of Zechariah; it is probable that he would have rejected the counsel of the princes of Judah, when they would have persuaded him to join with them in the worship of strange gods; and yet the events that actually took place shew that there was in him a lurking unsteadiness of faith, and indifference of love and duty towards God, which perhaps Jehoiada never suspected. Therefore we must be always jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy; and judge ourselves, if we would not be judged. We must examine ourselves, as in the presence of God, and pray to Him to shew us, in the record of our own conscience, whether we are pleasing Him or men, whether we are trusting in Him or in men. If we have done anything that we know our wise and good human friend would condemn, we may generally conclude that we are wrong. We have not an equally strong presumption of being right, if we have our human friend's approbation; for there may be secret sores in our heart, underlying the fair outside, which our friend's eye cannot reach, but which may be ready to break out to our ruin, when circumstances of temptation yet untried and unforeseen assail us.

And what security have we, or can we have, against these? None but the promise of God, that He will never fail them that seek Him. The fairest show of earthly life can give no more than a comfortable hope, not a certain assurance, of final perseverance. Is then, the early show of virtue valueless? Not so; it is a gift of grace, and a pledge of grace yet to be bestowed more abundantly upon those who continue in grace. Hast thou been carefully trained in youth, and lived hitherto to the comfort of thy friends, and in earnest seeking of the glory of God? Give diligence, and pray without ceasing that thou mayest continue in the things that thou hast learned, and be found of Him without spot and blameless. Without His help, thou must still, after all that has been done for thee, be a castaway. For there is that about thee, and around thee, that will reach and stir up the motions of evil within thee to thy ruin. But hold fast by God, and thou shalt not thus fail. For He is faithful, and will not suffer thee to be tempted above that thou art able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that thou mayest be able to bear it. He will pour upon thee the gift of His Holy Spirit, whose fruit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth. He will guide thee with His counsel, and after that receive thee to glory.

Jehoiada

BY REV. ISAAC KEELING.

*"But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died," etc.—
2 Chronicles xxiv. 15, 16.*

The faithful high priest and wise ruler, whose lengthened course and honourable end are here briefly mentioned, filled a much larger space in the mind's eye of the prophets and statesmen of Judæa, from his own time downwards, than he occupies in the thoughts of modern readers. The extended notice of his conduct and character in the sacred history, as well as the momentous influence of the events in which he was a willing and selected instrument of Divine Providence, may indicate to us what share of our thoughtful attention his life and times deserve.

From a careful examination and comparison of what is stated in this book concerning the time of the several reigns, from Rehoboam down to Joash, it will appear that this patriarchal priest and true patriot, Jehoiada, was about *five years* old at the death of Solomon, and that he lived through the times of Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, and twenty-eight years of the reign of Joash.

Jehoiada was the grandson of that Ahimaaz (the son of Zadok the priest), who was

one of the messengers to warn David to pass over Jordan, lest the politic and diabolical counsel of Ahithophel should be acted upon; and who, after the defeat and death of Absalom, obtained leave from Joab to carry tidings to David, and by outrunning the other messenger gained the opportunity of giving David the first news of victory over his enemies, while he left him in suspense as to the death of Absalom. In 1 Chron. vi. 4, the successive high priests are mentioned, Zadok, Ahimaaz, Azariah, Johanan (which seems to be another form of the name of Jehoiada), and Azariah, who was high priest in the time of Uzziah (the grandson of Joash), and resisted that king's presumptuous attempt to burn incense in the temple.

During the youth of Jehoiada, the most eminent of this glorious line, the memory of Solomon's grandeur, and of the power and prosperity of the undivided kingdom of the twelve tribes, was still fresh in the minds of all Israelites of ripe years. When Jehoiada was of the age of twenty-one, the temple had been finished about forty years; and, except the treasures, and the shields of gold, which Shishak, the Egyptian conqueror took away, that glorious sanctuary retained its magnificence unimpaired. The conversation of his older friends would abound with recollections and regrets respecting the glories and the errors of Solomon's reign; his fathers officiated as the priests of the Lord amidst the solemn splendours of that house of prayer. They had been present when the ark was placed under the outspread wings of the Cherubim, and when on their coming "out of the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." Such remembrances in the conversation of his elders, and such supernatural, sacred grandeur in that "holy and beautiful house," where his fathers served as high priests, would combine with the direct instruction of these venerable men, to place him in most favourable circumstances for the right training of his mind and heart. Jehoiada was a young man, when Rehoboam, taught by Divine chastisements, was governing comparatively well. He was about twenty-five years old, when king Asa began his good and prosperous reign of forty-one years. Thus the former part of his life, the time when his habits of thought and principles of action would be commenced and gradually settled, was passed in a time of wise and good government and religious influence. Truth and righteousness had then a long ascendancy, and the blessed social and national results were constantly under his eye in obvious connexion with their moral causes. Under the pious reign of good Jehoshaphat, till the nineteenth year of Jehoiada's age, the same causes were still producing similar effects. The earlier and larger part of this great and good man's long life, was thus passed amidst scenes and events most auspicious for the formation of his personal character, by observation and reflection, and the silent power of long habit. As a thoughtful and religious observer, he was in a situation to receive numerous weighty and lasting impressions of the close practical connection of true religion with good government and national happiness.

When Jehoiada was about ninety years old, a great change began, the bitter fruit of what, years before, a worldly-wise policy had unwittingly sown. The twelve years from the death of Jehoshaphat to the accession of Joash were dark with crimes and calamities, with wicked government and national misery. The events of that shameful and disastrous period, displayed as through storms and lightnings, with startling contrast, and dazzling illustration, the same great, general laws of providence, the same constant and unfailing sequence of moral causes and effects, which in the better times of Jehoshaphat and Asa, were presented to the contemplation of observers like Jehoiada, as in calm and clear sunlight.

In the person of Athaliah (who to her husband Jehoram, and her son Ahaziah, was their counsellor to do wickedly), the house of Ahab, for twelve sad and gloomy years, was seated *beside* or *upon* the throne of David. During that fierce domination of the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the people of Jerusalem were compelled, *made* to build the high places of idols, and enticed to worship them. State murders were multiplied for the security of guilty power, and Divine providence delivered up the house and treasures of Jehoram to bands of foreign plunderers, who repaid the slaughter of his seven brethren upon his own family, slaying all his sons but the youngest. The death of that son, Ahaziah, in the first year of his reign, with forty-two of his male relations (and one of his brethren) by the orders of Jehu, and the murder of the remaining members of the seed royal of the house of Judah, by Athaliah, followed, in gloomy, but apparently natural succession. The slaughter of princes had become a common event. And by the revolting sins and the frightful, prolific evils of that hateful and baneful

ascendancy of the house of Ahab in the kingdom of Judah, the connection of wicked government with national decay and wide-spread misery was awfully exemplified.

"Athaliah had long been the virtual possessor of the supreme power in Judah," as the wife of Jehoram, and the mother of Ahaziah. But her son, being cut off, "she disdained a precarious and indirect authority, and would reign alone. Her spirit was perhaps at this time rendered *unusually savage* by the sanguinary proceedings of Jehu," at Jezreel and Samaria, against the family to which she herself belonged, and in which she had lost at one outburst of wrath, her mother Jezebel, her brother Jehoram, her son Ahaziah, with seventy other male descendants of Ahab. It would seem to her very probable that the sort of authority exercised by personal influence—*first* as queen-consort, and *then* as queen-mother, was in very great danger. It was likely that whoever of her grandsons might succeed to the throne, he would prefer the counsels and guidance of his own mother; and that his own mother would not willingly allow Athaliah to continue to retain her accustomed influence. Here then, in addition to the extravagant rage of a wicked mind, on account of the slaughter of her relatives at Jezreel and Samaria, there were two powerful motives,—either of them all-prevalent with an ambitious woman,—dread of losing her own power, and intolerable jealousy of being superseded *by another woman*. Thus probably she was spurred on, by her own vehement passions, to the atrocious resolution of destroying all the children of *her own son*, Ahaziah. Perhaps there was a third motive,—a desperate resolve that the house of Ahab should not fall alone—that the house of David should be involved in the same wreck and ruin. And in executing that dreadful determination, she unwittingly "fulfilled a part of the mission against the house of Ahab (see 2 Kings ix. 8), a part which Jehu could not execute"; for through herself the taint of Ahab's blood had been introduced into the family of Jehoshaphat, and she with her children and children's children, were included in the prophetic doom, that God would take away Ahab's posterity by the sword. The murder of Joash himself, forty-six years after the massacres by Jehu and Athaliah, and of his son Amaziah, twenty-nine years later by the sword of assassins, completed the accomplishment of the sentence against the males of Ahab's house. "The Lord would not destroy the house of David (2 Chron. xxi. 7) as He promised to give a light to him and his sons for ever"—but in the persons of Joash and Amaziah the doom was accomplished to the third and fourth generation, which was also a fulfilment of the general denunciation in the second commandment;—that God will visit the iniquity of idolatrous fathers upon their children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Joash was the third, and Amaziah the fourth from Ahab;—both of them, after ruling well for a season, relapsed into idolatry; and thus by their personal guilt, became additionally liable to the treasured arrears of wrath, as descendants of Ahab and Jezebel.

Three successive dynasties, of wicked kings of the ten tribes, rose and fell in the time of Jehoiada;—that of Jeroboam, which ruled twenty-four years,—that of Baasha, twenty-six years,—that of Omri, forty-six years. When the power of the house of Ahab began, by the accession of Omri, his father, Jehoiada was about fifty-six years old. He was contemporary with, and probably observed with intelligent and conscientious alarm, the beginning of that ruinous policy of Jehoshaphat which sought security for the throne and family of David, and perhaps recovery of lost dominion in the union of both kingdoms, by affinity with that able and wicked Ahab, who added the worship of Baal to the sins of Jeroboam, "and did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the kings of Israel that were before him." At the death of Athaliah, Jehoiada being then one hundred and two years old, saw the issue of that erring policy. He then saw the once powerful and dangerous house of Ahab reduced to one descendant, of seven years old; and only preserved from complete extinction, by its connection with that house of David, which, by an ungodly alliance with Ahab and Jezebel, had been dragged to the brink of destruction.

Such were the times in which Jehoiada had passed about a century of his long life; times which, from an early age he had doubtless intensely observed; belonging as he did to a family, in rank and influence, only second to the house of David, and in which ignorance or indifference in reference to such a series of events was scarcely possible. Yet during nearly one hundred years of his life we read nothing of him. He had probably spent many years in the high priesthood. While regular and official duties were his proper work and providential calling, he kept in his station, as a faithful man, being no ambitious meddler in affairs of state, but quietly and vigilantly attentive to the claims of duty. But had he been a thoughtless and indifferent observer, he would

have been old without experience,—remembering much, but destitute of wisdom,—and unfit for counsel or action at the season of urgent need and precious opportunity. Had he lived on *without observation*, his high station and venerable age would have ill qualified him to *do good in Israel* in such times. Had he been a *mere observer*, however attentive and thoughtful, however full of treasured recollections, however wise to reflect and to judge, we should but have found his name slightly mentioned amongst the genealogies, and the sacred history would not have paused to state how long he lived, or where he was buried.

But at one hundred and two years he comes forth openly as a man of action,—of sagacious, intrepid, influential decision—as a leading character—a ruler of the people—a champion for the truth and the right,—who by a series of well-considered, extraordinary, daring, and effectual acts of duty, in a time of frightful emergency, earns the praise that “he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward His house.” Long before he planned and executed the bold enterprise which delivered the throne, the temple, and the people, by the death of the murderess, Athaliah, he must have been acting with steadfast and courageous fidelity in his office as high priest. Two or three of the eight years of Jehoram’s reign, were in the lifetime of his father Jehoshaphat; and the last two were after the plunder of his treasures, the captivity of his wives, and the death of all his elder sons, and during the incurable disease with which the Lord visited him according to the prophetic writing of Elijah, 2 Chron. xxi. 12-15. “And there came a writing to him from Elijah the Prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father’s house, which were better than thyself; Behold with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods; and thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day.” It must therefore have been within the three or four years (from the death of Jehoshaphat to the slaughter of Jehoram’s sons) that what is mentioned in xxiv. 7, took place, “For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim.” These things must have passed at a period ending nine years before the death of Athaliah.

During the last twelve years, commencing when Jehoram slew his seven brethren, the power and influence of a violent and unscrupulous court were exerted to promote idolatry and to discourage the worship of the Lord. But it appears probable from xxiii. 8, that through all the confusion of these dreadful times, Jehoiada kept up the regular attendance of the Priests and Levites by weekly courses. The temple had been despoiled of its precious dedicated things, to enrich and adorn the houses of Baalim; and the house of God had been broken up; but amidst the treachery and deficiencies caused by wanton spoliation, the faithful servants of God continued their stated duties, even after the most frightful manifestations of tyrannical rage. Had the constancy of Jehoiada and those who served under him, been less uniform, he would not have had that continuous possession and custody of the temple, which enabled the infant Joash to be withdrawn from amongst Ahaziah’s sons when they were slain, and to be *hid* with Jehoiada and Jehosheba *in the house of God six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land*. Had Jehoiada at any time wavered, had he forsaken the plundered and dilapidated temple he would have been without opportunity to interpose unobserved; and had he not persevered in the worst of times in requiring the regular attendance by courses, the Priests and Levites would not have been at hand without remark or suspicion, when their presence in double numbers was wanted to effect the downfall of the usurper and the deliverance of Judah. 2 Chron. xxiv. 14. “And they offered burnt offerings continually all the days of Jehoiada.”

Keeping firm hold of the vantage ground afforded by quiet and regular perseverance in his holy duties, Jehoiada doubtless waited and watched, with careful and discerning notice, the course of events and the temper of the people. The terrific excess of such violence as Athaliah had exerted to seize the sovereign power, would for a time have a stunning and disheartening effect on the people generally. But in the course of years, the ordinary government of a wicked woman, becomes loathsome and contemptible, especially when destitute of the shadow of right, and upheld by mere force and terror.

In six years the terrors of Athaliah's power, unconnected as it was with any constitutional and lawful support, would abate; and men would grow ashamed, and indignant against themselves for submitting to be oppressed by such a monster. Many would be thus prepared to co-operate in any reasonable and promising scheme for her destruction. Jehoiada waited for this change in the minds of men. It is evident that Jehoiada acted with consummate judgment; consulted but a short time before the crisis of action with a few well-disposed commanders, whom he satisfied, that an heir of David, the son of Ahaziah, yet survived; and having shown him to them, bound them with an oath. The despised temple, unfrequented by the adherents of the usurper, still afforded shelter to the infant king, and was an unexpected mustering ground for his deliverers. By detaining that body of Priests and Levites that should have gone out by course on the Sabbath, which could be done without giving any of them previous notice; and by adding to these the men of five captains of hundreds, whose chiefs alone were in the secret; and with them chiefs of the fathers of Israel; a force was simultaneously brought together, from various cities of Judah; and without stir or tumult, or display of arms, was assembled at one time in the temple. Their several posts of duty being assigned them, they were furnished with weapons from the armoury of David, in the house of God. Then was the young king brought forth, and crowned amidst his armed defenders; and a lawful government, under a rightful monarch, was thus restored, before a blow was struck or a life taken. They were sounds of loyal triumph, acclamations of public joy, not of conflict, that reached the ears of Athaliah; and care was taken that the temple which she entered in her alarm, as an alien and an enemy, should not be stained with her blood; but she was slain beside the royal palace. 2 Kings xi. 17. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people that they should be the Lord's people." 2 Chron. xxiii. 17-21. "Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars," etc.

Thus after the worshippers of Baal had accustomed the people to hear of violence and massacre, a great and happy reformation was effected at the cost of two guilty lives; Athaliah and Mattan being great criminals against that law which was at once divine and national; and a foundation was laid for further peaceful triumphs of truth and righteousness.

After these things Jehoiada survived twenty-eight years, being fourteen years after king Joash attained maturity, and seventeen years after he was of the age at which Solomon begun his reign, with a manly ripeness of judgment.

The faithfulness of the aged patriarch was manifested by his so instructing Joash, and his sons Zechariah and Azariah—that Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days, wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him; and his sons proved worthy of such a father, Zechariah being a faithful witness against idolatry even to martyrdom; and Azariah being he who withstood king Uzziah, when he intruded into the temple to burn incense.

We find Joash at one time reproaching Jehoiada for dilatory management as to the repairs of the temple; a circumstance which one commentator interprets as implying a want of active zeal. But in all the eventful history of the Jewish monarchies, we shall find no more striking instance of high-principled and sagacious decision than in his first recorded acts; and from the first appointment of the Levitical priesthood to the royal priesthood of the Maccabees or Asmonean princes, no high priest appears so eminent in his station, so remarkable in his personal influence over the course of events, so powerful in his life, or so honoured at his death.

"They buried him in the city of David among the kings." At the time of his death, all concurred in the desire to give special honour to the instrument of so many benefits. The people had dwelt in peace under his shadow; the king who owed to him his life and throne, had not yet learned to be basely ungrateful. He who some years afterwards (ten, according to chronology of the margin of the Oxford Bible; so long it required to overcome *good* habits in a king and people who had no deep principle of religion) commanded that his cousin and faithful reprove, Zechariah, should be stoned "in the court of the house of the Lord"; and who, by a Divine retribution, was first plundered by the Syrians, and then slain by his own servants, and excluded at his burial from the sepulchres of the kings;—he united with his people in burying Jehoiada "in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward His house."

Jotham

BY REV. HENRY WRIGHT, M.A.

"So Jotham became mighty," etc.—2 Chronicles xxxvii. 6

In this short chapter we have an account of the prosperous reign of one of the last kings of Judah. In this short verse we have the secret of his prosperity. We are told that he was successful at home and successful abroad. He fortified Jerusalem and built fortresses throughout Judah. He successfully repulsed the attacks of his enemies and laid them under tribute. And we are told that the secret of all his power and success was this, that "he prepared his ways before the Lord his God."

I. His success as a king is attributed to his fear of God. The words of the sacred historian are as distinct as possible on this head. "Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." He honoured God, and God honoured him.

1. He acknowledged God's sovereignty over him; though he was himself a king, he acknowledged that God was King of kings. Though he was at the head of a great people, though there was no one in the whole land to whom he owed obedience, yet he felt he was not his own master. He knew the truth of that word, "By Me kings rule and princes decree justice." It was from God he had received his authority, and to God he must hold himself responsible.

2. It is clearly meant by the words before us that he did not try to please his people but he tried to please his God. He did not consider what would gain the most popularity, but what would be most pleasing to the Lord his God. He had no belief in that principle of modern statesmanship, that in the ears of a ruler the voice of a nation should be reckoned as the voice of God. No, brethren: he was not going to follow a multitude to do evil, he was not going to betray his royal position by making himself the creature of mere expediency. His belief was this, and the words before us imply that to the utmost of his ability he acted upon it—"righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

3. Not only did he acknowledge God's sovereignty over him, not only did he seek to regulate his conduct according to the law of God; the words imply that he felt his dependence upon God; he acknowledged that power and wisdom come from God, that all his projects and plans would avail nothing unless God were with him.

My brethren, this is a day in which we have need to learn such lessons as these. There are many who question the truth of God's sovereignty over the nations of the earth; there are many who question the responsibility of nations to God and His truth; there are many who cavil and scoff at the idea of the Most High taking any account of human affairs.

Ah, brethren, men may scoff at the idea of Divine judgments. There are those who may scorn the thought of being responsible to God and dependent upon Him, like the great king of old, who said in the pride of his heart, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?" but he learned to acknowledge that though he was high, there was One higher than he; he learned to confess there was One, with Whom all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; Who doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; Who putteth down one and setteth up another; Whose works are truth and His ways judgment; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase.

O let us make it our prayer that this truth be written on our hearts and the hearts of our rulers. Taking the words before us in a national sense they are most seasonable, they may well supply food for thought for us all, and should make us pray for our rulers that they may have the fear of God before their eyes, and govern not by rules of expediency, but of truth and righteousness.

II. The words before us reveal not only the secret of a king's success or a nation's success, but the secret of the success of every servant of God in running his Christian course. This that is said of Jotham seems just to describe what every one of us needs, if we desire to run our race with patience and finish our course with joy.

1. The first thing I would ask you to notice is this: he had deliberately chosen the

Lord for his God. We read, "He prepared his ways before the Lord his God." We do not know when it was he became decided; probably, like Samuel, he had known God from a child. The very name he bore bears on it the stamp of piety—Jotham, "The Lord is perfect"—and in all probability he had been brought up in accordance with his name; but with him the fear and love of God was not merely a matter of education; while thousands around him were following Belial, he had chosen the Lord for his God, he had entered into a solemn covenant with Him. The language of his heart was this, "This God is my God for ever and ever." In him is fulfilled that word, Isa. xlv. 5, "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Oh, brethren, is God your God? are you affianced to Him as a bride to a husband? Have you in deed and in truth subscribed with your hand to the Lord? Amid all that is changing here, do you know the blessedness of being able to lean upon the Unchanging One? Amid all that is fleeting and decaying and dying, have you the consciousness that your life is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God? Dear friends, have your eyes been really opened to know that Man Who died on Calvary, and have you fallen at His feet with Thomas, crying, "My Lord and my God"? Religion is worth nothing, it is not religion but the mere shadow of it, the mere husk with the kernel gone, unless it be what the very word implies, the "binding again of the heart to God." Oh, happy is he beyond expression, who can truly and deliberately say in his heart of hearts with Jotham, "This God is my God."

2 But let us look further at what is said of Jotham. "He prepared his ways." Let us pause a moment upon that word "ways." He prepared his ways—what a forcible expression it is! What are a man's ways? Why, we mean by it a man's whole conduct. We judge of a man by his ways; what his ways are, such is he. When we speak of a man's ways, we mean his ways at home and his ways abroad, among strangers, friends, business and recreation. We know how common the expression is in this sense; as, for instance, of a good man, "he walked in the ways of David his father"; or of a bad man, "he walked in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." "The ways of man are before the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings." Now what is said here of Jotham and his ways? "He prepared them before the Lord his God." And this word "prepared" in the original, as you will see from the marginal reference, has a double meaning. It means to prepare in the sense of getting ready or getting in order. It means also to establish.

First, think of it in the sense of getting ready or setting in order. I think the expression implies that he did not live thoughtlessly and carelessly. His case is just a contrast to that of Rehoboam (2 Chron. xii. 14). He did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. But it was not so with Jotham. He did not permit himself to be the victim of circumstances, like a straw that the stream carries just where it will. No, he prepared his ways, he thought them over, he set them in order. And notice where he did this, not before himself, that is what many do; not before his people, thinking over what would best gain their popularity; he did not follow either the dictates of his own heart, nor yet the practices of those about him, but he prepared his ways before the Lord his God; all his plans, all his purposes, he brought into the presence of his God: what He approved he followed, what He condemned he cast aside. Jotham's great care and anxiety was to see that his ways were in accordance with the law of his God. Every morning we can imagine his opening the book of the law to discover the will of his God, and every evening we can imagine his examining himself to see wherein he had come short.

Oh, my brethren, what an example we have here! Oh, how often we should have been saved from retracing our steps with sorrow, how many a mistake would have been prevented which has caused us perhaps many bitter remorseful tears, if before we had gone on our way we had set our ways in order before the Lord our God, asking His counsel and seeking His blessing. It would have been well for Lot if he had acted thus when Abraham gave him his choice, but it is just what he did not do. He looked down instead of up; he looked at the well-watered meadows instead of the law of his God. Let me recommend to the young here this conduct of Jotham. Make it your rule to prepare your ways before the Lord; it is the want of this that leads so many into trouble. Whenever any path lies before you of which you feel in doubt, you would like to enter upon it, many attractions in it,—oh, do not enter upon it just because it is attractive, just because you would like it, nay, nor because your friends would like it. It is well

to consult with friends, but there is One with Whom it is still better to consult. But take it before the Lord, think what your Saviour would like. He will never fail to let you know His mind, if you desire it with an honest heart. And then whatsoever your conscience tells you to be the right way, take it, and take it whatever it may involve.

But he prepared his ways in the sense of establishing them. The word is often used in this sense; for instance, Psalm lxxviii. 9, "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary." So again when the Psalmist says, "My heart is fixed," this same word is used. So here King Jotham became mighty because he established his ways, he did not waver in his purposes, he did not falter in his counsels, he did not fail in his projects, whatever he purposed he carried out.

Now what was the secret of this? He established his ways before the Lord his God. He knew he had not strength nor wisdom of his own, but all his purposes, all his plans he laid before the Lord. He got the Lord to set His seal to them, and thus they could not fail of success.

My brethren, what an example we have here again! Here is the very secret of success in our undertakings, the secret of victory over our spiritual enemies.

In ourselves we have no strength. Let us make good resolutions in our own strength, let us contend against sin by our own might, and we are sure to fail. All human goodness must prove sooner or later like the early dew that passeth away. We may be convinced of the sincerity of our hearts, of the honesty of our purposes, of the strength of our resolution; but let them rest upon the flesh, and sooner or later they must fail. On the other hand let us establish our ways before the Lord our God, and they shall stand.

Do you remember that strange man who suddenly appeared before one of Israel's wickedest kings? He came without a weapon, without a guard, and yet boldly denounced that wicked man, and told him of the Divine judgment that was in store. "There shall not be dew nor rain," said he, "But according to my word." What made him so bold, so confident? He was one who established his ways before the Lord his God. This was the manner in which he introduced himself, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain but according to my word." Before Whom I stand. Here is the secret of Elijah's courage, of Elijah's confidence. He acted with God and he feared nothing.

A most interesting account is given in the journal of the Bishop of British Columbia of a number of North American Indians, who had been prepared by one of our missionaries for confirmation. One after another came to him to be questioned. They told him of their sorrow for sin, how it pained them. They told him of the forgiveness of God, how it cheered them. And then to the question why they wanted to be baptized and to be confirmed, again and again and again the answer came they wanted to be fixed in God's ways. They felt they desired earnestly to forsake sin, they desired earnestly to follow Christ; but they felt how weak they were without the help of God, that there was no security except in Him.

Remember, oh, remember, this is the secret of consistency, here is the real difference between those who are truly converted and those who are not, here is the reason why some turn away and some persevere: some are fixed in nature, some in grace, some fixed in themselves, some in God. In Psalm v. 9, we find David saying of those who did not trust in God, "There is no faithfulness in them." If you look in the margin you will see, "There is no steadfastness in them," the same word there as here. Oh, if we want to be steadfast, if we want to be consistent, let us remember the secret is "to be fixed in God."

Ahaz

BY REV. AUSTIN PHELPS, D.D.

"The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz," etc.—2 Chronicles xxviii. 19, 22, 23, 25.

King Ahaz is one of the stupendous monuments of guilt in Israelitish history. His career was one uniform and unmitigated stream of iniquity from beginning to end. So black and disgraceful was his reign, that when he died, the indignant and revolted conscience of the nation refused him burial in the royal sepulchre.

1. His career illustrates that law of character by which the wickedness of a man is proportioned to the amount of holy influence which he has conquered. We find a reason for his extreme depravity in the extreme facilities which he had for being a saint. He was the son of a godly father. His youth was passed under the restraints of holy example. He was one in a royal line which had been distinguished for examples of illustrious piety. He had good blood. He came from good stock. He knew that he alone, of all the monarchs of the world, held his crown and kingdom by divine right as king of God's chosen people. He knew that a splendid history lay behind him, and that a more splendid future was before him. In the line of regal descent, in which he was a connecting link, One was to appear in Whom all the nations of the world were to be blessed. That ancient promise of God to Abraham spanned like a rainbow the royal family of Judah. Mysterious as its meaning was, it must have been a power of moral restraint and moral stimulus to a man called of God to sit on the throne of Judah.

Said a French monarch, when once solicited to consent to a dishonourable treaty, "The blood of Charlemagne is in my veins; and who dares to propose this thing to me?" The sense of honourable inheritance must have been a moral power of immense significance to a monarch who stood in a line of theocratic princes. And it was not frittered away and lost in the mere sense of chivalry: it was a direct and potent help to holy living before God. Such a combination of holy influence this Judæan king broke through; and *therefore* he became the man he was. The depth of his fall was proportioned to the momentum acquired in bursting the bonds which held him.

Such is the natural working of things in the experience of sin. It is a fundamental law of character. As virtue is proportioned in vigour to the temptations resisted, so depravity is proportioned to the forces of conscience and inheritance and education and example and persuasion, and the Spirit of God, which have been fought with and conquered. This must always be reckoned in forecasting a man's future in a career of sin. The best things perverted are the worst.

2. The career of this apostate prince illustrates also the faithfulness of God in chastising wicked men for their good. "The Lord brought Judah low because of Ahab." From the beginning to the end of his reign, he experienced the truth that the way of transgressors is hard. In war he was whipped all around. In alliances he was cheated and checkmated. His people were made captives by thousands. Nothing went well with him. His public life was one long career of defying God, yet of God's persistent efforts to save him by chastising him.

This is repeated over and over again in the experience of wicked men. Such men often think it a great mystery that they suffer so much. They do not understand why it is that misfortune pursues them so. "Just my luck," says one, when ill success attends his business. Yet often the secret reason is that God is trying to save the man. He is contending with God in one way, and God is contending with him in another. There is no luck about it. It is God's faithfulness to the soul at the expense of the pocket.

The sufferings of this world are not in the strict sense retributive. They are disciplinary. The world of retribution lies farther on. In love, God holds the rod over many a bad man. He strikes him here, and He strikes him there. God's flail threshes him like wheat. He surrounds him with trouble. He heaps up misfortunes. They come thick and fast. Life is one long disappointment. "Few and evil have my days been," is his lament as he looks backward: "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Is not this the general feeling with which men reach old age without the consolations of religion? "Oh that I had never been born!" exclaimed Voltaire in his old age. But in this experience of the wicked, God is never vindictive. This is His way of striving to save men from eternal death. Sometimes He pursues it to the very last, till the grave closes over the incorrigible sinner, and he passes on to a world where the retributive decisions of eternity displace the benign discipline of time.

3. The life of this depraved prince illustrates further the extreme which sin reaches when men fight successfully against God's chastisements. "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." This is the fearful phenomenon sometimes witnessed in the developments of sin in this world. Some men are not subdued by suffering. They refuse to bow to chastisement. The more they suffer, the more they sin. Trouble angers them against God. They indicate their growing fitness for the world of woe in this induration of heart by which susceptibility to the softening effect of sorrow is destroyed. Sometimes this phenomenon is witnessed on a large scale. Times of

pestilence are proverbially times of unusual wickedness in great cities. The plague in London developed the vices of the metropolis frightfully. Men patrolled the streets singing ribald songs beside the dead-cart. In the peril of shipwreck, two classes of sufferers are often observed,—those whom the peril subdues to prayer, and those whom it drives to the rum-bottle.

Few things are so truthful a touchstone to the character of men as the way in which they treat the suffering which God sends as chastisement. One man turns at its bidding, and becomes an heir of glory: another defies it, and becomes a monument of perdition. Lord, who maketh us to differ?

4. The reign of this wicked monarch illustrates the disappointments which wicked men experience in their hopes of happiness in sin. The historian relates of him: "He said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But *they were the ruin of him.*" True to the life, every word of it! In no more truthful figure can we express the experience of many young men who enter on a career of worldliness. They see other men living for this world alone, as it seems to a looker-on, on the top of the wave of human felicity. A rich man seems to them a supremely happy man. A successful statesman appears to have all that an aspiring man can ask for. A man who has gained the summit of social rank and splendor becomes, to many who are below him, the model of earthly bliss. Any man at the top of the ladder seems very high up to a man at the bottom. So a young man is apt to look on the world to which he proposes to devote his being. "The world makes these men happy," he says; "and I will try it, that it may make me happy too." This is the secret experience, probably, of all who give themselves deliberately to a life of irreligion. They are allured by the glamour of irreligious prosperity.

But, when they try the experiment for themselves, "it is the ruin of them." The fruit turns to ashes. No such young man ever finds the world to be what it looked to be when he surveyed it from afar. It is a beautiful mirage. The testimony of experience is proverbial, that the richest men are not the happiest men. The most successful ambitious men are not the happiest men. The pleasure-seekers who seem to have their fill of all they planned for in life are not the happiest men. One word expresses the issue of all such experiments,—disappointment. This world is full of soured and disappointed men. The more irreligious men are, the more profoundly they experience this inward consciousness of *failure* in their life's plans. They have "hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water."

5. The career of this wretched prince illustrates the distinction which it is possible for a man to gain in this world as a monument of guilt. "He did trespass more against the Lord. This is that king Ahaz!" Such is the reflection of the annalist, after enumerating the monarch's crimes. "This is that king Ahaz. Look at him; mark him! let him stand in history as a monster of iniquity; let the world stand aghast at him." It is possible for a man of reckless impiety to become illustrious for guilt, and that only. Some such names stand out in history, and will stand thus for ever. Where all are sinners, some become guilty above their fellows,—princes in depravity; royal dukes in iniquity; men so like to Satan in character, that he dwells with and takes possession of them before the time.

This, I repeat, is possible to any man. It requires no great genius or invention. A man need not travel far and explore distant seas to gain the means of this hideous renown. It requires only a strong, persistent, and selfish *will*, determined to fight God. This is the natural drift of sin. What a scaffold is among human punishments, what hydrophobia is among deadly diseases, such may a man become among his fellow-sinners, by simply giving himself to himself, and defying the rights of God.

This is the legitimate ending of a long career of alternate chastisement and sin without repentance. A Cornish proverb says, "He that will not be ruled by the rudder must be ruled by the rock." This is the rock on which haughty and defiant guilt is wrecked. It is simply *left to itself*, to become what it has chosen to be,—such a demon of iniquity as to be abhorred of God and man. God save us from ourselves! We carry within us the elements of hell, if we but choose to make them such.

Hezekiah

BY REV. J. HILES HITCHENS.

"Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea," etc.—2 Kings xviii. 1—12.

Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz, the most corrupt monarch that had hitherto appeared in Judah—a man who, abandoning all the restraints which law and custom had imposed upon the Hebrew kings, followed the leadings of his own depraved imagination, and introduced the idolatrous religion of the Syrians into Jerusalem—a man who despoiled the sacred furniture and vessels of the Temple, and, as if regardless both of God and man, ultimately shut up the Temple and left the interior to neglect and decay. The Supreme Ruler of the Church and of the world saw fit to remove such an evil-doer from the throne. He died at the early age of thirty-six, but not before there was one ready, under Divine tuition, to take his place. Hezekiah was twenty-five years of age when he succeeded his father, and never did a godly young man step up to a position where piety and principle were more severely tested. He began his reign aright. The first month of the first year that he was monarch witnessed the purification and public opening of the Temple. Soon afterwards he revived the Passover, of which no celebration had been recorded since the time of Joshua. The day upon which the Passover should have been observed in the first year of his reign had already passed. So Hezekiah, holding that a late observance on another day would be a less evil than the entire omission for the year, directed that it should be kept on the fourteenth day of the second month, just one month beyond the usual time. Invitations were sent to the ten tribes which formed the neighbouring kingdom, and the matter was published far and near throughout Judah. The attendance was very great, the fervour of the people ran high, so that the festival was prolonged to twice its usual duration. The young king next proceeded to abolish the superstitions which his predecessors had encouraged. The monuments of idolatry were totally destroyed; the brazen serpent, which had been preserved as a memorial of God's goodness, was broken in pieces, and the "high places," or groves, which the kings of former days had spared, were overthrown. Hezekiah, doubtless, knew that such a work of reformation would be a severe shock to the prevailing sentiments of his subjects. Time-honoured associations made those shady groves, those consecrated altars, and that brazen serpent precious in the eyes of the people. To abolish these, and confine the attention of the nation to the Temple in Jerusalem was, in the estimation of the multitude, little less than sacrilege. I have no doubt there were many in those days who talked loudly against the doings of the king, and pronounced him an iconoclast, a revolutionist, a destroyer of the national religion, an ultra-secularist. But Hezekiah saw that, though some of the institutions of the Jewish Church were venerable with age, yet they had outlived their usefulness, and were being made subservient to the purposes of idolatry. He saw, too, that, as a vine is not injured, but rendered fruitful by a timely pruning, religion is often developed by casting off all connection with that which is an incumbrance. He was confident that God would take care of His own truth and ever smile on that which is right; and hence he was deaf to the voice of the alarmist. Whoever might oppose, and however widespread the disaffection, he knew truth, and purity, and Divine strength were arrayed on his side. Fearlessly he prosecuted his intentions, and the smile of Heaven rested upon him. Anxious for the extension of simple piety, he made an effort to collect and increase the sacred books. He directed that a large portion of Solomon's proverbs should be written out—the portion from chapter xxv. to chapter xxix. Jewish tradition says he gave commandment for the writing of Isaiah's prophecies, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Canticles. He revived the services of the Temple, and re-established the perpetual sacrifices, so that once more the offerings of the people maintained the treasury of the Temple.

But now came a season of painful anxiety to Hezekiah and his subjects. The renowned and powerful King of Assyria, Sennacherib, invaded Judæa. Surrounded by the Assyrian forces, and feeling at first unable to encounter such a mighty host, Hezekiah made overtures to avert the calamities of war. Sennacherib accepted the proposals for peace on condition that the King of Judah paid three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold—more than £200,000 of our money. The sum was raised with great difficulty, and given to the King of Assyria; but as soon as he received it he basely broke faith with Hezekiah, and intimated his intention to wage war. Accordingly

Sennacherib sent three of his generals in charge of armed men to besiege Jerusalem unless it surrendered. The terms of the message brought by these generals were so insulting to Hezekiah and to the God Whom he worshipped, that he resolved at once to withstand a foe so utterly destitute both of piety toward God and decency toward man. He felt what all truly right-minded men feel to-day, that there is a limit beyond which quietude is cowardice and silence is sin; that peace at any price is a favourite principle with the "Prince of this world"—a principle which, if always followed, would sell the very Church of Christ to the devil. In the stand which the king made he was supported by the Prophet Isaiah, who in the Lord's name promised the utter overthrow of the Assyrian hosts if Hezekiah kept true to the right. The threatening letter which Sennacherib sent to Hezekiah was laid before the Lord, and the good King craved the interposition of the Most High. His prayer was heard, and the answer of the Lord was vouchsafed through the mouth of Isaiah. The day of terrible suspense drew to its close. Few could have slept that night in Jerusalem, and what transpired outside the favoured city is best described by the inspired words: "It came to pass that the Angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand." By what means this terrible visitation was accomplished, whether by the hot pestilential wind or by a plague, we cannot say. It is enough for us to know that He, Who has all the powers of nature under His undisputed control, that night swept out of terrestrial existence 185,000 men.

Humanity is frail. The loftiest as well as the lowliest is exposed to sickness and disease. Kings as well as their subjects are not impervious to the effects of anxiety and excitement. Hence, whilst Hezekiah was perplexed and agitated by the doings of Sennacherib, he was seized with illness—an illness which brought him to the very gates of the grave. Most pathetic is the record of his utterances, as preserved by Isaiah (Isa. xxx. 8). Turning his face to the wall, he called upon that God Whom he had loved and served. The earnest and believing cry was speedily answered. The Prophet Isaiah entered the sick chamber with the surprising tidings that, in three days, the king would be restored to health, and his life prolonged fifteen additional years. As a sign that the words of the seer should be fulfilled, God caused the shadow of the sun upon the dial of Ahaz to go back ten degrees. On the third day the monarch recovered, and very hearty and expressive were his thanksgivings. Never before or since has any man possessed an exact knowledge of the length of his days; and peculiarly strange must have been the feelings with which Hezekiah watched year after year, of the fifteen allotted him, depart. They were, however, peaceful and prosperous. When, after a reign of twenty-nine years, the sceptre fell from his grasp, and the crown from his brow before the touch of death, great was the lamentation among his subjects. They had learnt to love him and trust him. Many who, when he first came to the throne, shook their heads with ominous fears, and were ready to express themselves harshly concerning the young king's reformation work, now felt that they had mistaken the man. Time proved him to be a consistent, courageous, devout, God-honouring, champion for the unadulterated truth of God. His funeral was one of unusual public demonstration. "All Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death." His remains were deposited in the highest niche in the sepulchre of the sons of David, and the inspired scribe wrote concerning him:—"After him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."

Such a career of usefulness and honour I hold up to you, young men, for your constant imitation. I would have you from early years to be valiant for the faith delivered to the saints. You will find it desirable and necessary at times to contend for purity and truth. The contention may not be agreeable to your tastes, and may involve you in much self-sacrifice, but it is often Heaven's method of serving the cause of righteousness, just as God clears the atmosphere by thunderstorms and tempests. Think of Hezekiah's efforts, despite the opposition of his subjects; think of the Prophet of Horeb, and his contention with and triumph over the priests of Baal; think of Paul encountering the Stoics and Epicurean philosophers at Athens; think of Apollo's "mightily convincing the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ"; ay, think of our Divine Master disputing with the Pharisees and Sadducees, and as you think of these bright examples, hear the voice of Jude still sounding down the corridor of centuries, and saying, "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." I do not ask you, young men, to court disputation and conflict, but I beg you not to shun it when occasion demands. I do not ask you to hurry into a collision, but

not to stand by a silent, idle spectator when truth and error, right and wrong, are in combat. I do not advise your rashly challenging the leaders of the false, but not to refuse to take up the gauntlet when virtue is defied. I beg you to spend your best energies in work for Christ, but whilst working with one hand, be sure and hold a weapon in the other. Whilst tending the sheep, be ready to drive away the wolves. Our holy faith deserves a holy fervour on our part for its defence. Our cause is righteous and honourable. Our Leader is wise and valorous. Our supplies from Heaven's treasury are inexhaustible. Our ultimate victory is secure. But, brothers, you must be resolute, vehement, impartial, prudent and persevering.

I beg you, then, to observe that such a courageous defence of the truth *must spring from spiritual enlightenment*. There must be a living conviction and a loving attachment to the truth in your own heart. Thus was it with Hezekiah. It is written of him, "He clave to the Lord and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses." If Hezekiah's mind had not been delivered from the darkness, ignorance, and superstition that prevailed, he would never have been the man he was. If his nature had not been introduced into the liberty and light of true godliness, he would never have wrought such a work of reformation for his subjects. But he was early brought to love the Lord, to love His Word, to reverence His precepts, to bow at His footstool in importunate prayer, to keep his heart open to the Divine dictates, and his will ever ready to perform the unerring behests. Hence he was prepared to influence others in the same direction. So must it be with you, brethren. You must first know, love, and follow the truth before you can ever successfully and courageously defend or disseminate it. In the physical world there must be first some vital and prolific seed, which contains in itself the life which is to be developed before there can be any organic and enduring production. In like manner, there must be in your spirit a positive acquaintance with and attachment to the fundamental verities of God. The merely negative will not do. Doubts, objections, hostilities to existing errors will not be enough. There must be confidence, assurance, determined clinging to the aspects of Divine truth presented in the Holy Book. There must be life in you, or you will be unable to act with lasting, living effects on those about you. Your own soul must be the battlefield on which the first victory must be won; and in the degree in which you are successful there will be your triumphs over humanity.

I ask you now to observe further, that a courageous defence of the truth *must be preserved by confidence in God*. Thus was it with Hezekiah. It is written in 2 Kings xviii. 5, "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel." That trust strengthened him for the task he set himself so resolutely to perform—that trust carried him victoriously through it—that trust was the linking of his weakness to infinite strength, that trust was the placing of the child's hand in the hand of the Father of Spirits. All things were possible to him then. So, if you or I desire to be kept firm and unfaltering in our grasp of the truth, and our labours for its spread, we must have faith in God. It is written, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass"—or literally—"Roll thy undertakings on the Lord; trust also upon Him, and He will do it." Yes, He will do what you are inadequate to do, and He will aid you to do rightly what He calls you to perform. It was confidence in God that kept Luther like a rock in the midst of the ocean. Hear his words, "Expect everything from me except flight and recantation. Fly I cannot: recant I will not." On another occasion, when Spalatin sent a messenger imploring him not to enter Worms, his reply is well-known to the youngest among us, "If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon the houses, I would enter." And then when he stood before the august assembly he calmly replied, "I can and will retract nothing for it is not safe for the Christian to speak against his conscience." Would you know the secret of such kingly strength? Then come with me, and listen to his prayer. "God unchanging! I rely on no man. It is in vain. All that is of man totters; all that proceeds from man fades away. Oh God! Oh God! hearest Thou not? My God! art Thou dead? Thou but hidest Thyself; Thou hast chosen me for this work—I know it. Keep Thee by my side; I am ready to quit my life for Thy truth. I will not withdraw from Thee now, nor in all eternity. Though the world should be filled with demons, though my body, which is yet the work of Thy hands, should be forced to bite the dust, to be stretched on the ground, cut in pieces, reduced to powder, my soul is Thine; Thine is my soul! it will dwell eternally near Thee! Oh God! aid me." It is by such reliance upon Omnipotent Grace that we shall be strong and stable. When a man knows that his cause is a right one, and feels that he can with a calm conscience lay

the matter before God, as Hezekiah did the threatening letter, then he can repose upon the Almighty. That reliance upon the Lord Jehovah, in Whom there is everlasting strength, will keep him faithful at the post of duty, and will at the same time, preserve his spirit in perfect peace. Like those heights above us, where nothing ever disturbs the serenity—or like those depths of the mighty ocean which are never agitated by storms—the man who trusts in the Lord with all his heart possesses an equanimity which renders him strong and persevering.

Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the courageous and consistent defence of the truth *will always meet with the approval of Heaven*. Of Hezekiah it is said: "The Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth"; and again in 2 Chronicles xxxii. 27, it is written: "Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour; and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels; store-houses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him substance very much." He encountered opposition at the first, but that was overruled, and his efforts became favoured by both God and man. He learnt that "when a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Fifteen years were added to his pilgrimage and his reign—years mainly characterised by peace to the nation, prosperity in commerce, and pleasure to himself. And when his end came, and the record of his life was penned for subsequent generations, the noblest testimony was borne to his character and career—a testimony that kindles in our breasts a holy and laudable aspiration.

Dear young men, be you well assured that nothing was ever lost by conscientious, courageous, consistent conflict for Christ and His truth. I do not say that wealth shall be bestowed upon you as a reward for your zeal for the Lord—though even *that* may be granted if God deem it best. But I can promise you the benediction of the Most High, which will make all circumstances and surroundings contribute to your peace and pleasure. We are told that Cyrus gave Artabasis, one of his courtiers, a cup of gold, at the same time giving his favourite Chrysantas nothing but a kiss, whereupon Artabasis said, "Sire, the cup you gave me was not so good gold as the kiss you gave Chrysantas." So I say to you, young men, worldly riches may not be so valuable and serviceable to you as some other bestowment of Heaven. The sweet kiss of Divine favour, the sunny smile of a Saviour's approbation will be far more golden than much worldly goods laid up for many years. That token of Divine approval you shall have, if, like Hezekiah, trusting in the Lord, walking in His commandments, and commending your cause to Him, you are valiant for truth and righteousness. But remember God and truth must come first in your estimate; yourself and your fellow-men last. Aristotle well, said, "Though Socrates be a friend, and Plato be a friend, yet the truth is to be preferred before them both." Better far, if it must be so, that we alienate from us all our professed friends than that we suffer the truth of Jesus to be dragged through the mire of the world, and the crown rights of the King of kings to be trampled under foot. We shall never want a friend so long as purity and truth are on our side. In the dying words of John Wesley we shall be able to exclaim, "The best of all is, God is with us."

Hezekiah

BY REV. EDWARD S. ATWOOD, D.D.

"Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea," etc.—2 Kings xviii. 1—12.

Hezekiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." His theory of government was a simple one; to make it as far as possible a transcript of the Divine government. Statesmanship, in his conception of it, was no familiarity with human precedents, a mastery of the wiles and contrivances by which men in power manage to make all events subserve their purpose, a skilful sword-play in which some trick of fence is more highly esteemed than truth and righteousness. His single endeavour was to do just what God would do under the circumstances, and that ideal of what a ruler should attempt relieved him of a multitude of difficulties and saved him from what might prove an unfortunate choice among expedencies. With that one purpose

sovereign and constant, all details of administration grouped themselves about it, and in harmony with it, as the atoms of the gem aggregate themselves about the centre of crystallization, the value and lustre of the jewel, due to its unity. No government of contradictions this, whose worth was to be ascertained by averaging its failings and its merits, but an honest attempt on the part of the king to make his rule an answer to the prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven."

It is the fatal defect in most forms of government that this over-rule of God is ignored. It seems to escape the notice of statesmen that human affairs are girdled by inexorable and invincible Divine law; that men cannot with impunity break out of bounds; that history is being slowly but surely shaped in accordance with the purposes of the infinite will: that kings and presidents, with all their pride of position, are powerless to hinder the working out of God's plan. To do "that which is right in the sight of the Lord," is the fundamental and unalterable principle in all policies of government that vindicate themselves in history. Treasuries and armies and the intrigues of cabinets may win temporary successes; but they are short lived. Sooner or later the fingers of fire write doom on the walls of every Belshazzar's palace. Statesmen should go to school to God. He reigns everlasting and "the kingdom or nation that will not serve Him shall utterly perish."

Hezekiah "trusted in the Lord God of Israel." That gave him confidence and made him uncompromising in all his measures. He was no cautious strategist, trying experiments, uncertain of their issue, advancing so slowly that there would be opportunity to retrace his steps if the event seemed likely to disappoint his expectations. He did not trust in his own shrewdness and far-sightedness. He was not anxious about the signs of the times, a calculator of popular weather probabilities. No one more well aware than he of the unreliability of the tone and temper of public moods. He trusted in God, the eternal and the unchanging, a personal God, the Lord God of Israel, "doing His pleasure in the armies of Heaven and among the children of men." So he had no responsibility except for duty; consequences were in higher and wiser hands than his. Like a soldier under command, he had only to obey orders. And withal he had a serene and satisfying assurance that he should be contented with last results. The Divine wishes could not be thwarted, and whatever pleased God would please him.

An atheistic policy of government, and a ruler with little or no faith in God, both lack stamina. When the first Napoleon came to the throne, and saw how unbelief was destroying both the faith and the conscience of the French nation, he said to his advisers, "If there is no God, we must create one." No man can prosperously direct the affairs of a great people without personal faith in God. There are crises in affairs when he loses heart and hope unless he "endures as seeing Him Who is invisible." There are times when popular clamour demands measures that promise brilliant results, but are indefensible in character, and a man must stay himself on God in order to be able to oppose the wild current of public opinion. There are hours when the policy of strict righteousness threatens immediate disaster, and the temptation to slight concessions for large apparent good is strong, and how can king or president resist it unless they are able to look up through the obscurity and confidently say, "Clouds and darkness are round about Him, but judgment and justice *are* the habitation of His throne"? The greatest rulers have been men of sublime faith, and out of their confidence in, and commerce with, the Infinite, they have drawn their inspiration and strength. Many things are thought essential to statesmanship, native talent, long experience, a quick eye for affairs: but there is no mistake in writing up as the first articles in the code, "Have faith in God."

Hezekiah "clave to the Lord and departed not from following Him." This religious faith was something more than an intellectual assent to certain general truths, more even than the recognition that Divine Providence is the operative factor in human history. His convictions had a personal force and caused him to see that he ought to be, and led him to endeavour to be, himself a good man. Behind all the righteous measures he proposed, there was the weight and push of a righteous character. It was not enough that the service due to God had mention in public documents and on state occasions; he himself must render that service in his private capacity. The people must see, in his individual behaviour, the recognition of the sovereignty of those principles that were imbedded in the statutes, and gave shape and colour to the national policy.

It is a grievous error which political partisanship sometimes announces that the private character of a ruler has little or nothing to do with his fitness for places of

public trust. It is true that devoted piety is not of itself a sufficient qualification for high office; true also that personal stains and blemishes in a man in authority do not render it certain that his administration of public affairs will be vicious and disastrous. History is witness that good men have made grievous failures as rulers; that bad men have shown wisdom and prudence and a regard for the well-being of the people in the conduct of national interests. But neither of these facts is to be elevated to the importance of a precedent. Other things being equal, the better the character of king and governor and legislator, the stronger the presumption that their administration of affairs will be judicious, sound, and strong. The man who governs himself rightly has taken the first step towards knowing how to govern others for their good. If he fail in the proper management of his own life, he is likely to prove insufficient for the large demands made upon him by high position. There are good men who are not great, and there are great men who are not good, and each lack the essentials of rulership, though the former are safer to trust than the latter. The man who is good as well as great is the only man who has a right to aspire to, and the only man whom the people are justified in seating in, the place of sovereignty.

"And the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went." This is the brief but significant summing up of the history of Hezekiah's reign. The account is notable for its omissions. There is no record of new territory added to the kingdom, of armies organized, of treasuries filled, of advance in industrial enterprise and business prosperity, the specifications that figure so largely in the common description of national growth. In the thought of the inspired writer, the enumeration of items like these was of small importance in comparison with the great overshadowing fact that the Divine presence was visible, and the Divine favour evident, in the whole course of the people's history. That of itself was sufficient to ensure success and renown. Since God was for them, who or what could be against them?

Hezekiah

BY REV. AUSTIN PHELPS, D.D.

*"Hezekiah . . . did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," etc.—
2 Chronicles xxix. 1, 2.*

One human life illustrates the whole government of God. We live under such overshadowings of God's purposes, that at every turn we come upon something which shows forth principles which are eternal. Truth is stranger than fiction. Romance cannot equal the grandeur which every human life, if read aright, discloses. Hence it is that the Bible is made up so largely of fragments of biography.

1. Studying the life and reign of Hezekiah, we discover, among other things, that he is an illustration of the sovereignty of God in conversion. He was one of the model princes of Judah. Yet early in his life his conversion was one of the most improbable of events. He was the son of one of the most impious monarchs that ever sat on the throne of Israel. Bad blood was in his veins. His youth was cursed by a most polluted parental example. The abominations of Oriental idolatry were the atmosphere of his childhood. Not in the retirement of a private home, surrounded by better homes, did he live, but among the splendid corruptions of a court which set the current of popular opinion, and defiled the whole kingdom. No other spot on earth is so fatal to youthful innocence as a corrupt court. Yet there this heir to the throne was born and bred. Parental and royal example combined to make him a bad man and a worse king.

It is the mysterious lot of many other men, to be born and educated under circumstances which render their conversion to God intrinsically improbable. They seem born to vice. They are trained to immorality. Childish and even infantile lips are taught to profane God's name. It is one of the unsolved mysteries of God's government, that such enormities are permitted. Humming-birds seem to have a more blessed existence than the children of such impious fathers and mothers.

Yet God often enters such homes with His saving grace. He speaks the word, "Thou art Mine," and a child of immortality is saved. Christ is swift to take such a little one in His arms, and bless it; and it becomes an heir of glory. It is like God to do sovereign things. Therefore it is like God to do things which to human view seem to border on the impossible.

2. The conversion of Hezekiah, therefore, should give encouragement to the children of unchristian parents. So much is often said, and justly, of the covenant of God with Christian parents, that sometimes in the contrast a cloud seems to rest over the destiny of those who do not share that blessing. Said one child of vice, "My father was a drunkard, and my grandfather was a drunkard before him; I shall be a drunkard too; we belong to a race of drunkards. I may as well accept my lot first as last: it is my fate." Said another, a man of high culture, but notorious for his ungoverned passions, "My father was just so: his boys are all so. We can't live in peace together: we never did. We are all possessed of the devil: I can't help it."

Not so does God reason. "All souls are Mine," He declares. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father," is His law. "If he beget a son that seeth all his father's sins, and doeth *not* such like, he shall *not* die for the iniquity of his father: he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." The principle of individual responsibility is most sacredly built into the foundations of God's government. He never swerves from it the breadth of a hair. In this respect, every man, woman, and child on the globe stands alone before God, as if no other man, woman, child, had stood before them. Each one of us stands alone,—alone here, alone at the judgment, alone for ever. Each sins alone, is judged alone, is saved or lost alone. The solitude in which every man dies is an emblem of the individuality of his being for ever.

It is also the *way* of God to save men when to human view their salvation is incredible. He delights in miracles of grace. The early disciples could not believe that Saul of Tarsus was converted. It is not recorded that they had ever prayed for his conversion. That was the quickest way of putting an end to his persecution of them; but it does not appear that they ever thought of it. But God was beforehand with them. Saul, before they knew it, was praying for them. God loves such paradoxes of grace. Unwritten biography is full of them.

True, it is a great blessing to have been born in the line of a godly ancestry. But it is a greater blessing to have been born at all, under the grace of God, in a Christian land, and under the gracious providence of God. Some of the best of men have been illustrations of Divine grace to the worst. What of heathen converts to Christianity? Heaven is already becoming populous with the children of idolaters, liars, drunkards, thieves, adulterers, murderers. Go back far enough in the ancestral line of any of us, and we come to a generation of cannibals. What but the love of God *first* took off that ancestral curse?

3. The upright character of Hezekiah illustrates also that the conversion of men is often assisted by their natural recoil from extreme wickedness. The young monarch must have come to the throne in a state of disgust with his father's crimes. He must have felt the dishonour of them to the royal name. He must have seen the wretched condition of the kingdom on account of them. His subsequent life shows that as a young man he must have been thoughtful and of tender conscience. He was just the man to blush for his father's disgrace, and to recoil with a young man's pride from his country's shame. This class of influences, under the grace of God, may have been the means of his salvation. It is noticeable that his reform was begun instantly on his accession to the kingdom. He lost no time. He was evidently prepared for his work by previous thought and resolution.

This is one of the benevolent devices of God for the defeat of sin. Sin is often so used as to defeat itself. One of the reasons why it is permitted to run its course, and come to a head, is that men may see it in its hideous maturity. Only thus can we know it as it is. The delay of God in its punishment may be often due to this law. And it often works to the salvation of souls.

Even irreligious men are shocked by wickedness which exceeds their own. A young man's first knowledge of the world, when he goes out from the innocence of his childhood's home, often produces a recoil from the world's depravity. He did not know before that sin was so vile a thing. He starts back from it, and begins to feel his need of prayer. Not long ago a young man who had just entered college wrote home to his father, saying, "I did not know how wicked young men could be till I came here. I shall not get through without a wreck unless I committ myself as a follower of Christ." From that time he consecrated his life to God. God used the very enormities of sin to save him from sin.

So the child of vicious parents is often saved from vice by his early knowledge of vice. Many a drunkard's child has never tasted a drop of intoxicating drink. The Holy Spirit is ingenious in devising ways of alluring men to Heaven. He draws men in backward

in their recoil from hell. He uses sin to defeat sin. When a prairie is on fire, and the traveller is in danger of being surrounded and suffocated by the roaring flame, he has a way of fighting fire with fire. So the Spirit of God sets guilt against guilt. Temptation is checkmated by the very ghastliness of the crime which it proposes.

The young should cherish, then, as for dear life, their first revolt of conscience from abounding sin. The sensitiveness of a soul not yet inured to vice is the guard which God has given for its protection. The backward spring from mature depravity is a token of moral health : it may be the prelude to the soul's conversion.

4 The narrative before us illustrates the fact that when God converts men from amidst surroundings of great depravity, He often has some great and signal service for them to do for Him. Such was the case with King Hezekiah. God summoned him to the reformation of a kingdom. He trained him for it by permitting him to see the guilt and the ruin of his father's reign. When the critical time came, He lifted him out of the slough of iniquity, and made him one of the signal examples of a godly prince, whose name should give lustre to the Jewish throne for ever after.

God knows where to find His chosen ones. He sees them from afar. They may be born in dens of vice, and nurtured in almshouses and attics and cellars. But He Who was born in a manger has His eye upon them ; and He brings their feet out into a large place. They stand at last before kings. Their usefulness in the end is proportioned to the lowliness and the peril of their beginning.

5. The work of King Hezekiah illustrates the moral power of one man in effecting a great work to which God has called him. From the narrative it appears that the reformation of the kingdom was at first the idea of Hezekiah alone. "It is in my heart," he says, "to make a covenant with the Lord." Nobody seems to have put him up to it. No Prophet came to warn or to stimulate him. The movement grew up silently in his own heart. God and he planned it alone. Probably he had been brooding over it and praying over it for years. Men do not spring into such honour at a bound. At last he was the soul of the reform. The idea was his ; the measures were his ; the execution was his.

So it often is in other great works of God. Some one man heads it ; puts his soul into it ; gives his life to it ; rouses other men, and energizes them in it. There is almost no limit to the power of a live man called of God to a great life's work. Other men fall back to the right and to the left, and let such a man go up the highway of the King, while they fall in at the rear, and acknowledge his lead.

In almost every group of Christian workers, some one such man is the confessed leader ; not the man that seeks leadership, but the man whom leadership seeks. Not great men and kings alone are thus exalted. God calls them from lowly places rather. Not many noble are called. The lives of such men as William Carey and Harlan Page are immortal witnesses to what one man can do, if he is roused by great ideas, filled with a great faith, endowed with a great soul, inspired by a great hope, and sets himself to work at God's bidding and in God's way. The secret leading of such men by the teachings of the Holy Spirit is akin to inspiration. They never lie in their proposals, and never fail in their achievements.

6. The work of King Hezekiah illustrates also the suddenness with which God often achieves by the hand of such men great changes in the progress of His Kingdom. Following the story of this ancient reformation, we learn at the end of the narrative that "Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people, for the thing was done suddenly." It was an instance of very rapid work of grace. Although the king had originated the movement, and set others to work out the idea over which he had long brooded, he found things ready to his hand. God had "prepared the people for it." They had been reading God's providence, as well as he. Secret currents of feeling were swelling in their hearts. All that they needed was a leader. When, therefore, the leader appeared in the person of their youthful prince, events moved quickly. Results ripened fast. Before they had time to dally over it, the thing was done. The kingdom was righted, and brought once more into line in the service of the living God.

This is another of the common laws of God's working. He prepares different agencies in different channels secretly. Each is quietly fitted to another by unseen strategy. The leader is fashioned for the people, and the people trained for the leader. Unknown to each other, men are set to thinking of the same thing. The same fire is kindled in many hearts ; the same resolves are created, the same hopes cherished. Perhaps no man knows the heart of his neighbour in the thing. Each man may think he is alone in it. But by and by the time comes when things are ripe for a disclosure of God's

plans. The leader appears, and unexpectedly finds that he has a large following. The people rise, and suddenly find that they have a born leader. Organization is easy. Everybody seems to have a mind for the work. The result is a great and sudden *growth* of Christ's Kingdom. Revivals of religion have illustrated this law over and over again. The history of Christian missions is full of it.

Manasseh

BY REV. DAVID THOMAS, D.D.

"Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign," etc.—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 1.

The history of Manasseh may be thus summarised:—He was the son of Hezekiah; was born upwards of seven hundred years before Christ; began to reign when he was twelve years of age; continued his rulership for fifty-five years; died at the age of sixty-eight, and was buried in a sepulchre which he had prepared for himself in his own garden. In his biography we have three instructive views of the *secular* and the *spiritual*.

I. THE ELEVATION OF THE SECULAR AND THE DEGRADATION OF THE SPIRITUAL.

Here is a man at the height of secular elevation. He is raised to a throne, called to sway his sceptre over a people the most enlightened, and in a country the most fertile and lovely on the face of the earth. In the person of this Manasseh, you have secular greatness in its highest altitude and most attractive position. But in connection with this you have spiritual degradation. Penetrate the gaudy trappings of royalty, look within, and what see you? A low, wretched, infamous spirit, a spirit debased almost to the lowest point in morals. Few names in the history of our sinful world stand out with more prominent features of depravity and vice than this Manasseh. Look at him socially. How acted he as a son? His father, Hezekiah, was a man of undoubted piety—a monarch of distinguished worth. Many earnest prayers he had offered, no doubt, for his son, and many tender counsels on religious subjects had he addressed to him. Yet what was the return for all this? His sire was scarcely cold in his grave, before the son commenced undoing in the kingdom all that his pious father had for years endeavoured to accomplish. "He built up again the high place which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the hosts of Heaven, and served them." His insane fanaticism in the cause of idolatry was not surpassed even by the king in modern times who most resembled him, Philip II. of Spain. How did he act as a parent? Was he anxious for the virtue and happiness of his children? No, "he caused his children to pass through the fire of the son of Hinnom." History represents the god Moloch, to which this Manasseh presented his children, as a brazen statue, which was ever kept red-hot, with its arms outstretched. Into these red-hot outstretched arms the idolatrous parent threw his children, which soon fell down a flaming mass into the raging furnace beneath. Look at him religiously—dupe of the most stupid imposture. "He observed times and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards." He was the maddened votary of the most cruel and monstrous superstition. Look at him politically ruining his country, provoking the indignation of Heaven. "So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." This elevation of the secular, and the degradation of the spiritual, so manifest in the life of this monarch, and so manifest, alas, in all time and lands, is not destitute of many grave and startling suggestions.

(1) It shows the moral disorganisation of the human world. This state of things can never be, according to the original plan of the creation. Can it be accordant with the original purpose of the Creator, that Wickedness should sit on thrones and hold the sceptres of the world in its grasp? Can it be that infinite Purity, intended to endow depravity with such worldly wealth and power? Impossible. A terrible convulsion has happened to the human world; a convulsion that has thrown every part in disorder. "All the foundations of the earth are out of course." The social world is in a moral chaos. The Bible traces the cause, and propounds the remedy of this terrible disorganisation.

(2) It shows the perverting capability of the soul. The greater the amount of worldly good a man possess, the stronger is the appeal of the Creator for his gratitude and devotion. These earthly mercies urge self-consecration. Moreover, the larger the amount of worldly wealth and power, the greater the facilities as well as the obligations to a life of spiritual intelligence, holiness, and piety. But here, in the case of this monarch, you have, what indeed you find, in different degrees, everywhere in human life, past and present, the soul turning these advantages to the most fiendish iniquity. The perverting capability of the soul within us, may well fill us with amazement and alarm. We can mantle the stars of truth with midnight, make the tree of life drop poison, and cause the very breath of God to be pestilential.

(3) It shows the high probability of a judgment. Under the government of a righteous monarch, will vice always have its banquets, its purple, and its crown? Will the Great Mechanician always allow the human engine thus to ply its wondrous energies in confusion? Will the great Lord allow His stewards to misappropriate His substance, and never call them to account? It cannot be! There must come a day for balancing long-standing accounts; a day for making all that has been irregular in human history chime harmoniously with the original law of the universe.

II. THE DEGRADATION OF THE SECULAR, AND THE ELEVATION OF THE SPIRITUAL.

The judgment of God, which must ever follow sin, at length overtook the wicked monarch. The Assyrian army, under the direction of Esarhaddon, invaded the country, and carried all before it. The miserable monarch quits his palace and his throne, flies in terror for his life, and conceals himself in a thorn brake. Here he is discovered. He is bound in chains, transported to Babylon, and there cast into prison. Here is secular degradation. Here, away in exile, chains, and prison, like the prodigal, he began to think. His guilty conduct passed under sad review—memory brought past crimes and abused mercies in awful and startling forms before him, and his heart is smitten with contrition. He prays, his prayers are heard, and here, bereft of every vestige of secular greatness, he begins to rise spiritually, to rise as an intellectual and moral man.

III. THE CONCURRENT ELEVATION BOTH OF THE SPIRITUAL AND THE SECULAR.

The Almighty hears his prayer. He is emancipated from his bondage, brought back to his own country, and restored to the throne of Israel. There he is now with a true heart, in a noble position—a real great man occupying a great office. This is a rare scene; and yet the only scene in accordance with the real constitution of things and the will of God. It seems to me that if man had remained in innocence, his outward position would always have been the product and type of his inner soul; that he who got a throne, would do so because of the moral nobility of his nature, and that in all cases secular circumstances, whether elevated, affluent, or otherwise, would ever be the effects and exponents of spiritual character. Manasseh's restoration to the throne, and the work of reformation to which he sets himself, suggest two subjects for thought.

(1) The tendency of godliness to promote man's secular elevation. The monarch comes back in spirit to God, and God brings him back to his throne. As the material condition of men depends upon their moral, improve the latter and you improve the former. As the world gets spiritually holier, it will get secularly happier. Godliness is material, as well as moral "gain." The system that best promotes godliness is the system that best promotes man's temporal well-being; and that system is the Gospel. Hence, let philanthropists adopt this as their grand instrument. When Christianity shall have won its triumphs over all souls, men's bodies will be restored to their lost inheritance of health, elasticity, force, and plenty, as Manasseh was now restored to his lost throne. There is a physical millennium for the world as well as a spiritual; the former will grow out of and reveal the latter, as trees and flowers their hidden life.

(2) The tendency of penitence to make restitution. Concerning Manasseh it is written: "Now, after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish-gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." Here is restitution, and an earnest endeavour to undo the

mischievous which he had wrought. Thus Zacchaeus acted, and thus all true penitents have ever acted and will ever act. True penitence has a restitutionary instinct. But how little, alas! of the mischief done can ever be undone! What can we do? We cannot destroy the fact of wrong. That fact will never be erased from the moral annals of the universe; it is chronicled with unfading ink on an imperishable substance. What can we do? We cannot destroy the influence of our wrong. The wrong that is gone out from us will roll its pestilential streams down the ages. What can we do? We can "cease to do evil," and, thank God! we can do more; we can make some compensation for the injury we have done the creation. We can by Heaven's grace open up within us a fountain for the washing away of sin and uncleanness; a fountain whose streams will bless with life and beauty many generations yet to come.

Manasseh

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God," etc.—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 12.

Manasseh was bereft of his father at the early age of twelve, and thus came to the throne so prematurely, as to be exposed during the whole of the most dangerous period of life, without a guide and without control, to the numberless and powerful temptations which beset so exalted a situation. It is but fair to remark, how much more he himself afterwards must have contributed to the good reign of Josiah, than he could himself have received from Hezekiah. He would leave affairs in such an order, as would greatly promote his grandson's good resolutions, even after the interruption of the short reign of his son. But the good Hezekiah knew but by deduction from a well-examined heart, what Manasseh had learned by painful experience. He knew but in the general what the other had seen and felt in the particular. He had, therefore, less insight into character, less distrust of appearances, less vigilance and caution. All proceeded in his court after an orderly manner, nor was he suspicious of evil under so fair a surface. It is the misfortune of a religious and good man in an exalted station, that while it demands a more acute discrimination of character, he has but few opportunities of acquiring that requisite. He is surrounded by men whose paramount interest it is to disguise their real characters, and to appear such as he wishes them to be. All take their outward hue from him, and good and bad are confounded under the same general colour. Thus the wicked idolatrous faction, which had been so rampant under his father, appeared now to be quite extinct. It was extinct only as a smothered fire, which bursts forth with greater violence for its confinement: and its lurking-places encircled the throne on every side.

The death of the good king instantly revealed the unsoundness of this imposing state of things. The throne was filled by one whose years and temperament no longer exacted the former precision and regularity; instantly the wheat and chaff flew asunder. The wicked threw off the mask, and it appeared, that of the crowd which filled the presence chamber of Hezekiah, the masquers had been the great majority. Desperate indeed must have been the hypocrisy which had surrounded his throne, when the son could rush forward with such eagerness to pull down all that he had built up. The hypocrites now avenged themselves for the painful restraint to which they had been so long compelled, and desirous to satiate their sharp craving by wallowing in the lowest filth of licentiousness, goaded on the youth to a systematic contrast with his father's holiness. This wickedness had a necessary connection with idolatry, which fostered and favoured every iniquity, while the law of Jehovah exacted perfect obedience, and met them with chastisement and rebuke. The Church of God was therefore put down in the land. The Lord's temple was defiled with the images and altars of strange gods, the high-places were again set up, Baal and Astarte resumed their fallen honours, the king's children were made to pass through the fire before Moloch, the wizards and enchanters and the whole legion of false prophets were re-called. As usual, the whole nation followed shouting in his train, the majority swayed by brute passion, the worldly-wise politician by the wish to do away the hatred which all other nations conceived for the

Jews, from their exclusive civil and religious polity, and to conciliate a powerful party at home. Thus the evil days of Ahaz returned, and the blessed interval of the reign of the good Hezekiah was as if it had never been. Even the evil example of the Amorites, who had been cast out from the land to make way for Israel, was now surpassed.

But desperate wickedness cannot endure the slightest hint of rebuke. To the common man, it is an affront which must be avenged, to the king, it is treason which must be punished. So Manasseh went on to expunge all memorials of holiness in blood. He filled Jerusalem from one end to the other with innocent blood, shedding it like water. The faithful servants of his father were sent to follow their master, perhaps with a cruel and jeering allusion to the custom of those barbarians who slaughter a great man's favourites over his tomb, that he might not want their company. But their blood cried out from the stones of Jerusalem, and the appointed chastiser of Judah and her rebellious kings was instantly at hand. He who had humbled Ahaz wrought still more effectually with Manasseh. The host of Assyria came up against him. But there was no Isaiah to announce deliverance from God, and his false prophets were found to have been counsellors of destruction. He was taken prisoner, and carried away to Babylon. This was the prelude of the fulfilment of the threatening prophecy which Isaiah had delivered to his father, and a sure earnest of the fulfilment of the rest.

Here, however, was the beginning of a most unexpected revolution. Idolater as Manasseh was, Babylon proved not to him the place of spiritual whoredom. He was shut out from its temptations by imprisonment, and perhaps her temples and idols, if seen by him, were not only disregarded but loathed, as the gods of his enslaver. Idolatry began to lose its beauty to him, as the face to a man who owes his ruin to its attractions: meanwhile the solitude and silence and spare diet of his prison, took the place of the noisy crowds, the mad revelry, and costly banquetings of his palace. They effected for him here, what the immediate neighbourhood of the Lord's temple had never done at Jerusalem: they brought the Lord into his serious thoughts. Hezekiah had sown seed, sound and good, in the child's heart, with many a prayer for corresponding fruit: and God heard his prayer: God's grace went with his sowing, and he gave, though late, and after many and long a blight, the full harvest. Now it was that, all hindrances having been removed, it sprang up: now it was that the blight and mildew of bad example having ceased to blow, it shot into blade and ear. The grace of God was alive within him. He cast back continued and fond looks upon his days of childish innocence, and longed to recover it. The more he looked upon the model of holiness which now began to unveil to his eyes, the more beautiful it seemed, and the more hideous the deformity of himself and his late companions—he looked from that picture to this, and was filled with loathing at the contrast. His enlightened mind now discerned the true characters of these men, and he at once abhorred them for their heartless profligacy, and himself for having shared in it. He saw the folly of their wickedness, and despised himself for having been so weak as to be led by it. Friendless and broken hearted, whither should he flee for comfort? Were the king of Babylon, at this moment, to open his prison-gates, the boon, though the highest he could receive at the hands of man, were poor and beggarly. He could not give deliverance to the spiritual captive, he could not set at liberty the bruised in heart. The false gods which he had formerly worshipped, he now found false indeed. His soul utterly despised and abhorred them. He had plunged into the depths of his own heart, and from that moment had seen the folly of interrogating wood and stone. But there he found Him Who is ever there found by a sincere searcher: he found the long-lost God of his fathers, Whose unseen hand had been leading him to this secret chamber of His glorious presence. He alone had the power to give him comfort. He alone, Whose temple he had defiled, could cleanse the temple of his body: He alone, Whose Prophets he had slain, could prophesy peace unto him.

But the first appearance of the Lord is full of terror to sinful man. "Depart from me, for I am a sinner, O Lord," is the earnest deprecation of the beholder. How then should Manasseh endure the sight? How should he stand in the presence of Him from Whom he had turned away in shameless apostasy, Whose appeals he had so long mocked at? Anguish and dismay would seize his soul. He would not dare to look up: his sins were more in number than the hairs of his head. But how different from his former turning away his face from God was this. He then averted his face in overweening pride: but now in self-abasement, and under a deep sense of degradation. For he had been deposed, not only from worldly, but from spiritual kingship: he was a wretched slave, both in body, and in mind, and in soul. But he was now moving in that course, where, as in a

circle, the very steps by which the penitent flees from God carry him in another direction towards Him : and while he looks in terror behind, at the flaming sword, he is suddenly met in front by the sceptre of mercy and forgiveness. So God now met the broken-hearted Manasseh, who, thus encouraged, dared to pray. He offered the sacrifice of a contrite spirit, and God was pleased with the sacrifice, and answered him with His Holy Spirit. With the heart of David he put up the petition of his forefather David, and prevailed : he was delivered from blood-guiltiness : he was washed from his iniquity and cleansed from his sin. The earnest desire of his heart from this moment, was to repair the offences which he had so freely acknowledged, and to undo by good example the mischief which he had caused by bad. With this purpose he prayed for restoration to his throne, and his prayer was granted. The king set him free, restored him to his rank of sovereign, and sent him back to rule his country. Thus, Manasseh, for complying with idolatry was taken captive by an idolater, for renouncing idolatry was set free by an idolater. Such are the different wages of compliance with man and with God.

And now the king of Judah was on his return from both a bodily and spiritual exile from the land of promise. With what a different heart did he retrace the steps by which he had gone into his captivity ; and weep, with joy and thanksgiving, upon spots where he had wept in anguish and shame, and imprecation. How free and enlarged in heart, how blest with the peace which passeth all understanding, did he proceed on a road which he had formerly trodden in the slavish and sullen spirit of crest-fallen pride. He returned as the apt forerunner of the return of his regenerate people from their captivity a century after. Even the outward senses had their share of delight. After a long sojourn, amid the boundless and dismal fens of the Euphrates, he came amid the mountains of his native romantic Judæa, which were now doubly pleasant, not only from the contrast, but from their holy associations with the history of his fathers and the language of the Prophets. But the penitent, however pardoned has continually to encounter the rebuke of his sin : and Manasseh, after gazing awhile in blissfulness of heart upon these hills, would suddenly snatch his eyes away, with a pang of shame and sorrow, when he saw them crowned with the hill-altars, which himself had set up. Or from some valley, into which he looked down, enchanted at its loveliness, and ruminating on some holy song, which it suggested, there would arise the sound of the sackbut of Baal, or of the drum of Moloch, gods both of them most unclean, and of his own setting up. Or, as he passed through the several towns and villages, processions of his idolatrous subjects would meet him with congratulation, and carefully decked in the most offensive symbols of their apostasy, would escort him as their devoted favourer, in triumph on his road. Thus his whole journey was one of penance, in which the joy of pardon, and anguish of retribution were strongly mingled. But when he came in sight of the holy city, and saw the temple of the living God surrounded by a crowd of temples, which his own hands had raised to false gods, and insultingly looked down upon by hill-altars, which himself had built upon all the surrounding heights, what an acute pang must have cut him to the heart. It was but the prelude to still sharper that awaited him within the walls.

But no sooner had he recovered from this shock than he gave ample proofs of his sincerity. The Lord was with him and he feared not man. Down fell the idols and altars of the false gods, and even their very ruins were cast, as an intolerable contamination, out of the city. The Temple was cleansed and repaired, and on the altar of the Lord, so long disused and ruinous, he offered peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.

But it is far easier to pull down than to set up again, and a people is more easily seduced to sin, than ordered back to righteousness. This found Manasseh. He could not entirely reclaim the people. They still sacrificed on high-places, and, though to the Lord, yet in disobedience to His statutes. Thus a door was still left open, of ready admission, to a still more grievous apostasy, which did not lose the opportunity, when his restraining hand was removed by death. He could fence the city with a wall against the assaults of Egypt, but he could not strengthen the hearts of Jerusalem with defences against the inroads of idolatry.

But he found the most bitter fruit of his former sin still nearer home. In all probability his son Amon had been born before his captivity. His earlier years therefore, had they even his father's guidance, would be past amid idolatry : and after his father's removal to Babylon, he was not likely to have for tutors any but the most devoted to idolatrous service. On his return, therefore, Manasseh found his son such as he himself had once been, and by this time advanced to an age which, in headstrong tempers, professing to

reason, will not be reasoned with. Without doubt Manasseh argued, discoursed, exhorted, entreated, threatened, without ceasing. But seldom can a reformed father succeed in reforming his children. Their age has not cooled them as his has him : they have all the sensual enjoyment of sin, with but little, as yet, of the mental wretchedness. Their offences, committed within a narrow and obscure range, rise not up in judgment against them in humiliating or alarming public consequences. Their bodily health is strong enough to bear the burden which moral irregularity ever imposes. Thus they go on undeterred in their course. Their blood runs high, their resolution runs strong, and they obey their own desires, and resist the advice of others with equal determination. They therefore consider their father's change as a change of bodily constitution, rather than of spirit, and ascribe it to the coldness and irresolution of advancing years, rather than to conviction. They will appeal to his former life both for authority for their misdeeds, and for a rebuke to silence his tongue.

Even had the youth with those around him dissembled, or carelessly acquiesced, Manasseh's trouble would have still continued. The experienced insight of a man, who had known so well and so long all the workings of idolatry upon the heart, could not have failed to discern occasional outbreaks of the unquelled spirit within. Had he entertained any design of depriving this son of his birthright, he durst not execute it, the idolatrous faction was too strong to suffer such an extreme measure; their now scattered forces would immediately find a rallying point. Perhaps they had submitted to his measures only because they had a near prospect of their recall in the reign of this very son. He had therefore before him the miserable prospect of leaving his throne to a son who would pull down all that he had been so laboriously building up, even as he himself had undone all that his father Hezekiah had done. Here was trouble and vexation, indeed, to his soul. In Amon he saw his former loathed self revived. The body to which he had died was alive with all its lusts rampant in his son; and another Manasseh would shortly work another downfall, both of the independence of his country, and of the worship of the true God. Here was occasion, indeed, to continue his fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.

But God did not leave His penitent servant comfortless. He granted him life long enough to see his grandson, Josiah, of an age sufficient to receive religious impressions. Here the old man found a well in the desert, and most probably the heartless inattention of the profligate Amon, abandoned the child to the first hands that would take him up for instruction, nor ever cared to inquire into the nature of what he was taught. Perhaps so indifferent was he to all shapes of religion, so long as they did not threaten to thwart his own inclinations, that it troubled him not, even if the child were brought up in the way of the Lord. And he might not be unwilling to gratify his father in a matter which gave himself little concern, and might find it prudent to yield obedience in one point. We may, therefore, reasonably suppose that the Church owed Josiah to the pious care of Manasseh, who unweariedly instilled into his tender mind the fear of the Lord, together with a loathing horror of idolatry. He could enforce his lesson by relating, in a manner well suited to make an indelible impression on the child's mind, the wretchedness of his own captivity. The darkness, the chains, the loneliness, the hunger, of his prison he could tell in that artless but lively manner, that the boy would never forget the dreadful penalty of the crime of idolatry. If his former self was living in Amon, his new self, thus day by day infused, took possession of Josiah, and the same spirit under a different name carried on that reformation which Manasseh's life was too short to establish. Such were the latter days of Manasseh, who beginning his eventful reign as a headstrong and unprincipled boy of twelve, concluded it as an humble and sincere penitent of sixty-seven.

Manasseh

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God," etc.—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 12.

The facts of the life of Manasseh are presented to us shortly in the inspired page. He began to reign when only a boy of twelve. His father, Hezekiah, was just dead, and the boy king got into the hands of clever and unscrupulous ministers who were

opposed to the worship of Jehovah. One of these, described by the Prophet Isaiah, was Shebna the scribe, a man of selfish character and great ambition, who virtually ruled over the kingdom. His policy was probably to let the young king gratify all his evil passions without control, and put down with a high hand those who sought to restrain or regulate his youth. The result was that the good servants of Hezekiah, most of them well stricken in years, were superseded by men of evil lives, who practised idolatry, and sought to establish it as the religion of the state. The Jewish tradition has always been that the great Prophet Isaiah was put to death at this period with horrible barbarity, being actually "sawn asunder." When his voice was silenced fear naturally fell on the other servants of God: licence and encouragement were openly given to heathen rites and worship of heathen deities, and the whole condition of the kingdom became worse than it had ever been. Notwithstanding the danger in which they stood there were a few men of God who spoke warnings to the king and people, "but they would not hearken." "Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria." King Manasseh was overwhelmed by the presence of the invading forces, and fled from his capital. He was, however, overtaken, and led off in triumph. This happened probably about the twenty-third year of his reign. As a prisoner in Babylon he lingered for twelve long years. During these years he turned to God in repentance; and he was at length restored to freedom and his kingdom, where he spent the twenty years of life that still remained to him in an attempt to undo what he had done in youth. His long reign of fifty-five years closes therefore not inauspiciously; and he died penitent, leaving a son, just come to manhood, to emulate, alas, his sins, without following him in repentance.

And now let us pause for a little on the sin of which he was guilty, and what is said about it. The accounts given in Scripture are very short, and we have to gather from their suggestions the story of many years. Manasseh's, then, was a policy of idolatry. This was the head and front of his offending, done so openly that the first two commandments of Sinai seem to have been the object of his hatred and opposition. He reversed the proceedings of his father Hezekiah, and built again the high places which had been broken down. He set up images of Baal everywhere throughout the kingdom. The cruel rites of the heathen, instead of being feared and fled from, were courted; and in the Valley of Hinnom, below Jerusalem, a perpetual fire was kept burning, through which little children were passed as an offering to Moloch.

Exceeding boldness was characteristic of Manasseh's idolatry. There was no concealment about it, and there was no limit to it. The very Temple of Solomon was turned into a place of heathen worship. All round the two Courts were placed altars dedicated to the host of heaven. Nay, so far did the impure desecration go, that a brazen statue of Baal was set up in the very House of God itself, probably in the Most Holy Place, thereby anticipating the two forms of profanity that Daniel speaks of, one perpetrated by Antiochus in the time of the Maccabees; and the other the great sin that is yet to be committed by Antichrist in the last days.

Manasseh's, again, was a policy of immorality. This was especially connected with the worship of Astarte, the Syrian Venus. These two things always, indeed, go together, idolatry and immorality, but perhaps they never went farther than on Syrian soil, and it was this sort of social life that Manasseh let loose like a flood of pestilent water over the land of Judah.

It was, again, a policy of persecution. Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of the licence and the evil which were openly done. The old religion was first disestablished, and then idolatry set up under pain of death.

Once more, Manasseh's was a policy that destroyed, as far as it could, the Word of God. Every copy of it to be found was apparently consigned to the flames. When Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, came to the throne, on cleansing the Temple there was found hidden away a copy of the law—and so rare was it, and so unknown, that on its being read before the king, he rent his garments as he heard for the first time these words of God.

Such, then, were the sins for which Manasseh became notorious in the early years of his reign.

We now meet very unexpectedly with the fact that this great sinner repented of his wickedness. To the man who was thus revelling in sin there came a great calamity. He who would have scoffed at the thought of trembling before God had to be dealt with in another fashion. Whatever the immediate cause, we see the working of God's hand

in the invasion of Judah by the hosts of the king of Assyria. The sinner is seldom a brave man; and the people who have been corrupted by evil licence are easily overwhelmed. The virtues of manhood are gone. And so the next picture of this profligate Manasseh is his hiding away in flight in a cluster of thickets, hiding, like Adam—not, however, from God, but from the avenging hand of the Assyrian soldiers. Caught like a bird in the net, he is carried to Babylon, and there, in disgrace and wretchedness, is left to pine in prison. It is a time of humbling, and solitude, and bitter reflection. At first, possibly, thoughts of self-destruction passed through his brain; for that is often the miserable refuge of the defeated sinner, who tries not to believe in a hereafter, and also thinks that it is better not to be at all, than to live on as he is. But conscience often makes such a man too great a coward. And the next turn is the hopeless anguish of despair.

I can see this wretched young man (for he is not yet forty years of age) casting himself down upon the floor of his prison, and sobbing out in tears the misery of his helpless and craven soul.

But, thank God! that was not the end. Another stage succeeded. I do not think I can be wrong in supposing that the lessons of his boyhood, given him by his father Hezekiah and his mother Hephzibah, began to come back to him in those solitary hours,—the lesson of David's life, the lesson of Solomon's wisdom, the lessons of that Book of God which he had been so diligent to destroy, because it rebuked his fatal career. And when, with the text, he read the commentary in his own life, and saw what sin comes to, as God had said; and how the life of godliness that he had seen in Hezekiah and in the murdered Isaiah was the true life that God asked for and that God blessed: then Manasseh's eyes were opened, and his bitter question was, "Have I lost my soul?"

We see, then, that the occasion of his repentance was affliction. It was the utter destruction of everything in this world that Manasseh had to build upon; the sweeping away from him of everything that he had: wealth, honour, influence, ease, power, kingdom, even freedom, at a single blow. That, followed by a long, lonely time, in which thought was his only occupation. Nothing else could bring that man to himself. God saw that if he was to be saved, it could only be by such a process of beggary and shame. This young reprobate, caught up by the strong hand of Eternal Mercy in the midst of his sins, with the blood of a hundred righteous men upon his soul; with a Tophet of fire in his own unsanctified and filthy heart; see him plunged into a miserable dungeon. We stand amazed at the door of Manasseh's prison. Those bleared eyes are dim with weeping; that bloated countenance is wet with tears; he is on his face on the ground; these sobs are words of entreaty to the God of Abraham. Here is a marvel. Behold, he prayeth. Ay, even king Manasseh the reprobate, in the prison-house of Babylon.

It may be useful to see farther what is said about his repentance, for its character is set before us as well as its occasion. There are three things told us which, as we meditate on them, seem to mean a great deal. He turned to the Lord in his trouble. That is expressed by saying "He besought the Lord." That is, he just turned round his heart towards God. He had never turned anything but his back to God before. He had fled from God as fast and as far as he could, even more than from the king of Assyria. Sooth to say, he had thought God the greater enemy of the two, for he feared that He was the enemy of his joy and comfort, and that He would take all pleasure out of his life. But down there, in Babylon, when everything else was gone, he began to think on God, and on what he had heard of Him. And then the broken heart began to turn round towards God, with the dim thought, Can I find help in Him?

The second thing told us is that "he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers." And it was very humbling work. For a man who had been treated with adulation and flattery all his life, with never a wish ungratified, and never a word disobeyed, to be here and now a broken-hearted, vicious exile. That was humiliation indeed. But for such a man as he to make confession of his sins—what must it have been? where to begin? and where to end? Nobody in all the past to be compared to him; nobody in Judah, hardly any one in Israel, not Ahab even, hardly even Jezebel, that name of shame and sin. I know not anybody in history who laid a bigger burden of guilt down at the feet of God; who made a more humiliating confession of his past life than Manasseh the prisoner.

But there is a third thing told us of his repentance. Having turned to God, and having humbled himself, he "prayed unto Him." Then he expected to be heard. O

Manasseh ! great was thy faith. To think that God could pardon thee !—that His mercy and His grace were so infinite that He would not send thee away !—that, after all thou hadst done, and when thou hadst nothing to give—an empty, penniless, portionless prisoner—thou hadst only to cast thyself for mercy upon God, and He would have mercy upon thee—there was faith at which we may well be surprised. I almost wonder that the Apostle did not put Manasseh's name into the eleventh of Hebrews, when he was telling of the great deeds of faith ; for what could be more wonderful than Manasseh's expectation of pardon and of mercy, when he prayed unto God ? After this, and after the answer—what sinner, what penitent sinner, need despair ? Is it not written for the very purpose of showing us, first, what God can make affliction and suffering to be to a man, and then, how certainly God hears and answers the cry for mercy that comes from a broken heart ?

Another thing about Manasseh's repentance is striking, and that is the remarkable change in the man's life that followed it. It was like a man going into a bath covered over with soot and filthiness, and coming out of it *washed*. There was something totally new in Manasseh's experience after he had cast himself upon God for mercy ; he had never done it before ; and something told him that he had received mercy, he had passed into a new life. All the outward circumstances were for a time the same. The air was still that of Babylon, not of Judæa. His place of residence was still a *prison*, not a *palace*. He could not go and come as he would. He had no one so poor as do him reverence. But he himself was a pardoned sinner ; he felt that now he could go to God in his bondage, and thank Him that he was forgiven ; and, while feeling more than ever what a sinner he had been, yet he could himself rejoice in pardoning mercy, he could tell of thankfulness ; he could even sing the Psalms of his ancestor David, as he had heard them in earlier days. There was now a light in his prison, because there was hope in his heart.

We are, however, naturally anxious to know how far this repentance was shown to be thorough-going, and whether it was lasting. We must notice, therefore, the remainder of his life. After what has been already described, a great change took place in his fortunes. He was set at liberty. He was allowed to go home. He was replaced upon the throne of Judah. Now when he got back, he must have been in circumstances of peculiar trial and temptation. Up to this time he had no child, and the throne had been kept vacant during the twelve years, because he was known to be still alive. Those who had been at the head of affairs may have been the representatives of the Assyrian power, in which case they would be heathens ; but at all events they cannot have been men of God, for all such had been put to death. Consequently Manasseh went back to be surrounded by his old friends, companions, and courtiers ; by ministers of state, rulers and governors, who were all notorious idolaters.

Our first question is—What will he do ? Will his conversion stand good now ? Will he be faithful to God ? Will he meet these old friends and say, "I am a new man—I can worship Baal no more ; Jehovah only is my God" ? Manasseh did it : though he stood alone in the court, and almost alone in the capital. Hear what is said. "He took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." There was consistency ; there was courage ; there was confession before his people of the change in his own heart ; there was the witness of testimony for God. It was done in the face of every old friend and follower and courtier, ay, and boon-companion, that he had in the kingdom. What do you think of it ? Are you satisfied about the reality of Manasseh's repentance now ?

It was, unfortunately, not quite complete. He just stopped short of being out-and-out for God. He let the old high places remain, of which it is written that the people, led by Hezekiah, threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin. Manasseh spared them, at the same time bidding the people sacrifice only to Jehovah there. He did not destroy these places, he thought he might make use of them. Just what Christians now-a-days think they can do. They will not give up everything that is doubtful, but will try to turn such things to a better purpose.

Manasseh continued to the end. He never went back from his position. His change lasted for twenty years ere he died : but here was just the one point in which he failed to be like David and Hezekiah, "perfect with the Lord his God."

But there is a very solemn lesson for us in the fact that, though Manasseh's repentance was accepted by God, yet he could not undo the effects of his previous sin. We are told that it was his sin, and the sin of the people in his days, that precipitated the ruin of the kingdom. He had let loose the dogs of destroying vice, which he could not capture again.

And, alas! it is so with men still. The past may be forgiven, but it cannot be recalled. Paul was a new man, all his sins blotted out; but that did not bring Stephen—of whose blood Paul was guilty—back again to life. You and I, before we were brought to repentance, did much that we regret and sorrow for: it has been forgiven us, but it is still perhaps going through the world, as a spirit of evil, doing injury to others. That only shows us still more than ever the need of forgiveness, the incalculable consequences of sin, the awful character of sin itself. It should make us the more thankful that our sin—such sin—is forgiven. It should make us the more careful lest even now we sin against God or man. And it tells us how, when we stand thankfully forgiven, and saved through the blood of Jesus at the last, we shall yet be ashamed beyond measure and beyond words, at seeing something of the evil which we have helped to do. We had not known that sin was such an evil thing: God be praised that we have been delivered from it!

Josiah

BY REV. J. H. NEWMAN, B.D.

"Because thine heart was tender," etc.—2 Kings xxii. 19, 20.

King Josiah, to whom these words are addressed, was one of the most pious of the Jewish kings, and the most eminent reformer of them all. On him, the last sovereign of David's house (for his sons had not an independent rule), descended the zeal and prompt obedience which raised the son of Jesse from the sheepfold to the throne, as a man after God's own heart. Thus, as an honour to David, the blessing upon his posterity remained in its fulness even to the end; its light not waxing "dim," nor "its natural force abating."

Josiah was but eight years old when his father was slain. We hear nothing of his boyhood; but scarcely was he of age to think for himself, and to profess himself a servant of the true God, but he chose that "good part which could not be taken away from him." "In the eighth year of his reign" (i.e., when he was sixteen years of age), "while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father." Blessed are they who so seek, for they shall find. Josiah had not the aid of a revealed volume, at least not of the Law; he was surrounded by the diversities of idol-worship, the sophistries of unbelief, the seductions of sinful pleasure. He had every temptation to go wrong; and had he done so, we might have made allowances, and said that he was not so bad as the other kings, for he knew no better; he had not sinned against light. Yes, he would have sinned against light—the event shows it; for if he had light enough to go right (which he had, for he did go right), it follows, that if he had gone wrong, it would have been against light. Not, indeed, so strong and clear a light as Solomon disobeyed, or Joash; still against his better knowledge. He had that, which all men have, heathen as well as Christians, till they pervert or blunt it—a natural sense of right and wrong; and he did not blunt it. In the words of the text, "his heart was tender"; he acknowledged a constraining force in the Divine voice within him—he heard and obeyed. Though all the world had told him otherwise, he could not believe and would not, that he might sin without offence—with impunity; that he might be sensual, or cruel, after the manner of idolaters, and nothing would come of it. And further, amid all the various worshipers offered to his acceptance, this same inward sense of his, strengthened by practice, unhesitatingly chose out the true one, the worship of the God of Israel. It chose between the better and the worse, though it could not have discovered the better of itself. Thus he was led right. In his case was fulfilled the promise, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Or, in the Psalmist's words, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good under-

standing have all they that do His commandments." Or (as he elsewhere expresses it), "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts."

Such was the beginning of Josiah's life. At sixteen he began to seek after the God of his fathers; at twenty he commenced his reformation, with a resolute faith and true-hearted generous devotion. From the language of Scripture, it would seem, he began of *himself*; thus he is left a pattern to all ages of prompt obedience for conscience' sake. Jeremiah did not begin to prophesy till *after* the king entered on his reformation, as if the great Prophet's call were delayed on purpose to try the strength of Josiah's loyalty to his God, while his hands were yet unaided by the exertions of others, or by the guidance of inspired men.

At twenty, then, he commenced his reformation. At first, not having the Book of the Law to guide him, he took such measures as natural conscience suggested; he put away idolatry generally. Thus he set out, not knowing whither he went. But it is the rule of God's providence, that those who act up to their light, shall be rewarded with clearer light. To him that hath, more shall be given. Accordingly, while he was thus engaged, after a few years, he found the Book of the Law in the *course* of his reformations. He was seeking God in the way of His commandments, and God met him there. He set about repairing the Temple; and it was in the course of this pious work that the high priest found a copy of the Law of Moses in the Temple, probably the original copy which was placed in the ark. Josiah's conduct on this discovery marks his character. Many men, certainly many young men, who had been so zealous as he had already shown himself for six years, would have prided themselves on what they had done, and though they began humbly, by this time would have become self-willed, self-confident, and hard-hearted. He had already been engaged in repressing and punishing God's enemies—this had a tendency to infect him with spiritual pride: and he had a work of destruction to do—this, too, might have made him cruel. Far from it: his peculiar praise is singleness of mind, a pure conscience. Even after years of activity against idolatry, in the words of the text, "his heart was tender," and he still "humbled himself before God." He felt full well the immeasurable distance between himself and his Maker; he felt his own blindness and weakness; and he still earnestly sought to know his duty better than he did, and to practise it more entirely.

Observe, then, his conduct when the Law was read to him: "When the king had heard the words of the book of the law, *he rent his clothes.*" He thought far more of what he had not done, than of what he had done. He felt how incomplete his reformation had been; and he felt how far more guilty his whole people were than he had supposed, receiving, as they had, such precise guidance in Scripture what to do, and such solemn command to do it; and he learned, moreover, the fearful punishment which was hanging over them; for in that Book of the Law were contained the threats of vengeance to be fulfilled in case of transgression. The passages read to him by the high priest seem to have been some of those contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, in which Moses sets good and evil before the people, to choose their portion. "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. . . . I call Heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing." "A blessing and a curse; a blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God: . . . a curse if ye will not obey." And there was more than the mere words to terrify him; there had been a fulfilment of them. Samaria, the ten revolting tribes, the kingdom of Israel, had been led away captive. Doubtless he already knew that their sins had caused it; but he found in the Book of the Law that it had been even threatened them beforehand as the punishment; and he discovered that the same punishment awaited his own people, should they persist in sin. Nay, a judgment had already taken place in Judah; for Manasseh, his grandfather, had been carried away into Babylon, and only restored upon his repentance.

In the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, you will see what was to be the curse of disobedience: or again, consider the words of the twenty-ninth chapter: "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God . . . that thou shouldest enter into covenant with Him, and into His oath; . . . neither with you *only* do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and *also* with him that is not here with us this day: . . . lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God" (alas! as it had happened in the event, even all *ten* tribes, and then the whole twelve had fallen away) "to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there

should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood ; and it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst : the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, . . . so that . . . the strangers shall come from a far land . . . when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it . . . that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, . . . even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land ? what meaneth the heat of this great anger ? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, . . . for they went and served other gods, . . . and the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and cast them into another land." These words, or such as these, either about the people or relating to his own duties, Josiah read in the Book of the Law ; and thinking of the captivity which had overtaken Israel already, and the sins of his own people Judah, he rent his clothes. Then he bade the priests inquire of God for him what he ought to do to avert His anger. "Go," he said, "inquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found : for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book."

It is observable, that not even yet does he seem to have known the Prophets Jeremiah or Zephaniah, though the former had been called to his office some years. Such was God's pleasure. And the priests and scribes about him, though they seconded his pious designs, were in no sense his guides : they were unacquainted with the Law of Moses, and with the Prophets, who were interpreters of that Law. But Prophets were, through God's mercy, in every city : and though Jeremiah might be silent or might be away, still there were revelations from God even in Jerusalem. To one of these Prophets the priests applied. Shallum was keeper of the king's wardrobe—his wife Huldah was known to be gifted with the spirit of prophecy. To her they went. She answered in the words of which the text forms a part : "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to Me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read : because they have forsaken Me, and have burnt incense unto other gods . . . My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, as touching the words which thou hast heard ; because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me ; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace : and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again."

How King Josiah conducted himself after this message I need not describe at length. He assembled all Judah at Jerusalem, and publicly read the words of the Book of the Law ; then he made all the people renew the covenant with the God of their fathers ; then he proceeded more exactly in the work of reformation in Judah and Israel, keeping closely to the directions of the Law ; and after that he held his celebrated passover. Thus his greater knowledge was followed by stricter obedience : his accurate attention to the whole ritual is the very praise bestowed on his passover ; "Surely there was not holden such a passover from the days of the judges." Whatever he did, he did it with all his heart : "Like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses."

Passing by the particulars of his reformation, let us come to the fulfilment of the promise made to him by Huldah, as the reward of his obedience. "Behold therefore, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace ; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." His reward was an early death ; the event proved that it was a violent one also. The king of Egypt came up against the king of Assyria through the land of Judah ; Josiah, bound perhaps by an alliance to the king of Assyria, or for some strong reason unknown, opposed him ; a battle followed ; Josiah disguised himself that he might not be marked out for death ;

but his hour was come—the promise of release was to be accomplished. “And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants, therefore . . . brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers.” Thus the best king of Judah died like Ahab, the worst king of Israel; so little may we judge of God’s love or displeasure by outward appearances. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”

The sacred narrative continues: “And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel”; probably there was a yearly commemoration of his death; and so great was the mourning at the time, that we find it referred to in the Prophet Zechariah almost as a proverb. So fell the last sovereign of the house of David. God continued His promised mercies to His people through David’s line till they were too corrupt to receive them; the last king of the favoured family was forcibly and prematurely cut off, in order to make way for the display of God’s vengeance in the captivity of the whole nation. He was taken out of the way; they were carried off to Babylon. “Weep ye not for the dead,” says the Prophet, “neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.” As for Josiah, as it is elsewhere written of him, “His remembrance . . . is sweet as honey in all mouths, and as music at a banquet of wine. He behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of the people, and took away the abominations of iniquity. He directed his heart unto the Lord, and in the time of the ungodly he established the worship of God. All, except David, and Ezekias, and Josias, were defective; for they forsook the law of the Most High, even the kings of Juda failed” (Ecclus. xlix. 1-4).

In conclusion, I would have you observe in what Josiah’s chief excellence lay. This is the character given him when his name is first mentioned; “He did . . . right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.” He kept the narrow middle way. Now what is this strict virtue called? it is called *faith*. It is no matter whether we call it faith or conscientiousness, they are in substance one and the same: where there is faith, there is conscientiousness—where there is conscientiousness, there is faith; they may be distinguished from each other in words, but they are not divided in fact. They belong to one, and but one, habit of mind—dutifulness; they show themselves in obedience, in the careful, anxious observance of God’s will, however we learn it. Hence it is that St. Paul tells us that “the just shall live by faith” under *every* dispensation of God’s mercy. And this is called *faith*, because it implies a reliance on the mere word of the unseen God overpowering the temptations of sight. Whether it be we read and accept His word in Scripture (as Christians do), or His word in our conscience, the law written on the heart (as is the case with heathens); in either case, it is by following it, in spite of the seductions of the world around us, that we please God. St. Paul calls it *faith*; saying after the Prophet, “The just shall live by faith”: and St. Peter, in the tenth chapter of the Acts, calls it “fearing and *working righteousness*,” where he says, that “in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him.” It is all one: both Apostles say that God loves those who prefer Him to the world; whose *character and frame of mind* is such. Elsewhere St. Paul also speaks like St. Peter, when he declares that God will render eternal life to them, who by “patient *continuance in well-doing* seek for glory.” St. John adds his testimony: “Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.” And our Saviour’s last words at the end of the whole Scripture, long after the coming of the Spirit, after the death of all the Apostles but St. John, are the same: “Blessed are they that *do His commandments*, that they may *have right* to the tree of life.”

And if such is God’s mercy, as we trust, to all men, wherever any one with a perfect heart seeks Him, what think you is His mercy upon Christians? Something far greater, and more wonderful; for we are elected out of the world, in Jesus Christ our Saviour, to a glory incomprehensible and eternal. We are the heirs of promise; God has loved us before we were born. He had us taken into His Church in our infancy. He by Baptism made us new creatures, giving us powers which we by nature had not, and

raising us to the unseen society of Saints and Angels. And all this we enjoy on our faith; that is, on our believing that we have them, and seriously trying to profit by them. May God grant, that we, like Josiah, may improve our gifts, and trade and make merchandise with them, so that, when He cometh to reckon with us, we may be accepted!

Josiah

BY REV. J. HILES HITCHENS.

"Like unto him was there no king before him," etc.—2 Kings xxiii. 25.

Josiah was only eight years of age when put in possession of Judah's sceptre. A lad in a position of such supreme importance was exposed to imminent and incessant perils. To the dangers which always environ youth there were added the peculiar temptations arising from his elevated rank, and the freedom to do and procure whatever he might desire. We rejoice, therefore, to find it stated of this juvenile monarch: "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David, his father, and turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left." That is a declaration designed to teach not that there were no imperfections, no failings in his character and conduct, but that the tenor of his life was in harmony with the will of Jehovah, that he made the great business of his days that of seeking the honour of the Most High. When only sixteen years of age he exhibited an invincible antipathy to the idolatry which prevailed, and before he was twenty years old he became engaged in declared and undisguised warfare with that God-dishonouring system. He threw his whole soul into the work of destroying the common evil of his age. He superintended the breaking and burning of the images, the demolition of the houses close by the Temple, which were occupied by persons who aided in the licentious rites, and the overthrow of the sanctuaries that stood just outside the gates of Jerusalem. The altars which Ahaz and Manasseh had reared were all destroyed, and the dust cast into the brook Kidron. The high places were desecrated by being covered with the bones of the dead; and then, as had been foretold 326 years before the birth of Josiah, he carried his zealous and reformatory work to the sanctuaries of Bethel and Samaria. He slew all the priests found ministering at those shrines, and having exhumed the bones of those who were dead, he caused them to be scattered on the sites of the idolatrous altars at which the departed priests had formerly officiated. Such determined efforts as these were successful in ostracising the curse of idolatry.

Having thus discountenanced the false, Josiah proceeded to encourage and promote the true. Having demolished the places where the things seen were deified, he commenced repairing and beautifying the house where the unseen Lord of all was worshipped. In the eighteenth year of his reign, and the twenty-sixth of his age, he commenced the work of restoring the Temple, which during the previous reign had fallen into shameful neglect. During the progress of the work the high priest Hilkiah discovered amid the accumulated rubbish a roll or book containing the law as given by Moses. What was the precise nature of the document we cannot say. Some are of opinion that it was simply the Book of Deuteronomy, whilst others say it was the entire Pentateuch. Whatever it was, manifestly it was a new thing to Josiah. He had been previously in ignorance of much, if not all, of the contents of the volume. He was filled with astonishment when he heard some portions read. He rent his clothes with intense sorrow and vexation when he found that, with all his endeavours to uproot the upas tree of idolatry and spread the true worship of God, he and his people had been unacquainted with duties of vital importance. Having conferred with Huldah, the prophetess, he at once summoned the people generally. An immense concourse of priests, prophets, and "people both small and great" assembled in the Temple. The king, taking his stand at the entrance of the inner court, and leaning against a pillar, read from the newly-discovered book. He then pledged the people to observe the words of the Lord, and to keep the commandments "with all their heart and all their soul." The public reading of the law was soon followed by the observance of the passover. The magnificence of the festival was wholly unexampled. The celebration in the reign of Hezekiah was not equal in grandeur to this. It is written, "There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet;

neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Thus are the good effects of the king's conduct recorded. Thus it is seen that the pious life and persevering labours of Josiah exerted an influence upon his subjects for their good and for Heaven's glory.

But the revival was not deep-rooted. Corruption had become so widespread and powerful that the doom of the kingdom was fixed. The Almighty determined to punish the idolaters, but resolved also to free His servant Josiah from the painful lot of those who despised His message. This deliverance had been the burden of prophecy, for we read: "Because thine heart was tender," &c. (2 Kings xxii. 19, 20). Those words were fulfilled in a manner and at a time Josiah least expected. The king of Egypt and the king of Assyria were engaged in open hostilities one with the other. To effect his warlike designs, the king of Egypt arranged to pass through the territories of Josiah, which were interjacent to those of the hostile kings. Josiah promptly refused permission to the Egyptians to make a passage through his kingdom, and directed speedy preparations to resist, even to blood. Accordingly the troops were called out for immediate service. The war-spirit ran high. No soldier in the ranks under the command of such a good king could brook the slightest shade of dishonour on the national flag. The battle-plain was reached. Near Megiddo the hostile powers stood face to face. The heartrending scene of strife and bloodshed commenced. Lo! in the midst of the conflict a cry of lamentation was heard, and many a faithful Hebrew ran to the quarter whence the cry proceeded, but it was too late. An arrow shot from the bow of some Egyptian archer had made the heart of Josiah its target—the king was fatally wounded. He was removed from one chariot to the other, quickly driven to Jerusalem, and there carefully attended; but human skill could avail nothing. Nature could not resist the stroke, for it was dealt by an omnipotent hand. Soon the silence and solemnity of death reigned in the royal chamber of the famed, youthful, pious Israelite. In the very vigour of manhood, in the midst of service for his country, when only thirty-nine years of age, the king was beckoned from earth, and the nation lost its loved and honoured leader. Who shall say how many plans of usefulness in an embryotic state were for ever left unfinished? Who can tell what bright prospects of peace, or, on the other hand, what mountainous difficulties were crushed, exterminated, dispelled in that moment when Josiah fell? This we can affirm, that in the sight of the Divine Arbiter of life the young king's work was done, and it was in mercy that he was removed so suddenly from among men.

There followed poignant grief, for the king of Judah was greatly beloved. Not only did the members of the royal household feel the pungency of pain, "All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah." Young men and maidens, old men and children—all, of every age and every class, joined in the general grief. The "singing men and singing women"—that is, the hired mourners who make it a profession to sing funeral dirges, strike their breasts, rend their clothes, and shriek and howl at the departure of a soul—attended to aid the mourners by their doleful noise. Universal grief was felt at the departure of the king. All willingly admitted his excellent character and solid worth. In every home there were those who mourned for him "as one mourneth for his only son," and were "in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Very much is conveyed in the few words, "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah." That short statement alone is sufficient to show the virtue and value of the King of Judah. Jeremiah was an ardent lover of God and all goodness. He was a seer whose soul was filled with intense antipathy to and sorrow on account of sin. For *him* to mourn the decease of Josiah was a tribute of praise of no ordinary character. It was as though the Prophet felt that there was one godly man the less; that the world had lost the influence of his consecrated life, the benefit of his zealous labours, the glorious answer to his believing prayers; that a righteous man who contributed to the strength of the nation was removed for ever.

Thus ended the career of one of the most beloved monarchs Israel ever possessed—the most useful and heroic man of his age. He was removed in the very zenith of his life. He had, however, accomplished more in the thirty-nine years allotted him than multitudes with equal advantages have wrought by a protracted history. But what made that short career so successful? What was the secret of all the good he effected, all the love he won, all the willing co-operation he secured, and all the guileless lamentation by which his death was followed? It cannot be said that it was found in the bald fact of monarchy. His position as king of Israel is not enough to explain the deep, sincere, lasting attachment of the people to Josiah, and the good he accomplished among

them. Monarchy undoubtedly places within the reach of the man who reigns a marvellous power for either good or evil. A homely word from kingly lips is weightier than a hundred sagacious utterances from commoners. An act performed by royalty will spread its sturdy influence to the most distant in the circumference of power. But the ungarnished fact that a man is a king is not enough to make his name dear, his person loved, his memory blessed. There must be something deeper and more enduring than mere titles, something at the basis and back of hereditary position and honour, something that would ennoble even if state dignity, dress, and dominancy were wrested from the grasp. That potent something was characteristic of Josiah. Hence, brethren, do not suppose I am setting before you an impossible task when I ask you to be like Josiah. Do not suppose that because he was a monarch, and you are lowly in your origin and occupation, the idea of being loved, influential for good, and regretted at your departure, is Utopian. There were certain marked features of his character which made him what he was, and these I press upon your attention. Remember that whilst his position as monarch made his influence greater, yet it rendered the cultivation of the excellences I am about to refer to more difficult. You may justly feel that while you are devoid of any help to usefulness which his royal relationship afforded, you are, on the other hand, freed from the terrible hindrances which that relationship created.

Josiah *cultivated his intellectual powers*. He did not plead his position as an excuse for search after knowledge. He did not proudly imagine that, because he was surrounded by sage and scholarly men to counsel him, he need not indulge in any mental effort. So anxiously was he in quest of the fullest information, especially upon things Divine, that he conferred with Hilkiah the priest, and was ready to receive instruction from him. An excellent trait in any man's character is the thirst for knowledge, and the resolute effort to develop the mental powers. But specially is this to be commended in young men. By it the humblest may rise to exert an influence most potent and salutary throughout all lands and all ages. By it the mind of a youth in any grade in life may, like the sun, be a centre of gracious influence and a source of gladdening light to multitudes, whilst other men, like the moon, may be slavishly dependent upon him.

Josiah cultivated *sensibility of heart*. He was not a man of icy intellectualism living in a region of frigid theories. He did not develop his mind at the expense of his heart. He was awake to all the sorrows and joys of those about him. He is proclaimed by God to be a man of "tender" heart. The sight or sound of woe vibrated upon his responsive soul. My brothers, I beg you to cherish the same sympathetic spirit. Never be guilty of estimating your fellow-creatures simply and entirely by an icy intellectual standard. Never allow either your sensibilities or your intellect to be alone; for sensibility without understanding will morbidly reduce you, even as the convolvulus without a support will trail on the ground, and intellectuality without tenderness of heart will leave you stern, cold, forbidding, even as a hop-pole without the twining plant.

But note particularly that Josiah cultivated *spiritual life*. He loved the God of his fathers. He pursued the perceptible path of the Divine precepts. He turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left. Loving the Lord himself, he used all his energies in uprooting prevalent evils, and disseminating the pure and true worship of the Most High. This spirituality was the chief feature of his character. The soul being right with God, the intellect and the sympathies were allied in the service of God. All his faculties and possessions bowed in willing allegiance to his devout soul. This was the main secret of all his acceptance with man and God.

To Josiah God gave the promise—"I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." His death whilst in the vigour of manhood was a reward for his true devotion to God's cause. For surely nothing can better satisfy the heart that cravingly thirsts for God—the living God—than immediate and uninterrupted communion with the beatific Presence. "The less of this cold earth the more of Heaven." That Josiah died suddenly on the field of battle does not prove that his end was not one of peace. He fell at the post of duty—he fell doing that which he deemed right before God and man; and how better would a Christian man desire to pass away? He was mercifully spared prolonged agonies and anxieties, and he was taken away from the evil to come. Fighting he fell, and falling he rose to glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life. Who would not wish to pass his days with the honour and happiness that Josiah tasted? Who, standing in thought by the grave of the beloved but youthful monarch, does not say—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his"?

Josiah

BY REV. C. A. HEURTLEY, D.D.

"Like unto him was there no king before him," etc.—2 Kings xxiii. 25.

Josiah was the son of a very wicked prince, who forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and set up idols, and worshipped them. He became king, when he was but eight years old, and he died at the age of thirty-nine; so that his course was not a long one: but it was, from beginning to end, a consistent course of faithful devotedness to God's service. "He turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."

It is a high praise to have turned aside neither to the right hand nor to the left; to have been thoroughly consistent. Yet the Christian must aim at nothing short of it. He that is content with aiming short of it is not a Christian in heart, whatever he may be in name. The best man comes short—very far short—of the high and holy standard of God's law. But the Christian aims at nothing less, allows himself in nothing less, than entire conformity to it.

Josiah began his upright course very early in life. "In the eighth year of his reign," says the sacred historian, "while he was yet young, (that is, when he was but fifteen or sixteen years old,) he began to seek after the God of David his father." Yes, he sought God early, and, according to God's express promise, he found Him.

And happy indeed are they, who, by God's grace, are thus led to seek God, "while they are yet young." No doubt, if a man truly and heartily turns to God, through Christ, however late in life, he is accepted and forgiven for Christ's sake. Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, is a very signal instance of this: and his conversion is left on record, that those who have grown old in sin may be encouraged to do the best thing, that under their circumstances remains for them, turn to God, even in the decline of life. But even if a man could be sure that he would turn to God in the decline of life, which yet no man can, it would be far better for him to do so in his youth.

It is a very great mistake that people make, and a very common one, to think, that, if we can only have our sins forgiven, that is the main thing to be looked to. Scripture sets a very different prospect before us. Forgiveness it represents as the first beginning of our Christian course. We are received by God as His pardoned and accepted children, as soon as ever we truly turn to Him in Christ. But then it is that we may go forward, fighting the good fight of faith, striving manfully against sin, subduing the evil that is within us, our evil tempers, evil lusts, evil passions, and growing in holiness and in conformity to Christ's image. This is what God has called us to.

The earlier then any one begins the Christian course, the farther he is likely to advance, if only he goes forward steadily and consistently; and I may say too, the greater are the advantages with which he sets out, to begin with. For though we all bring a sinful nature into the world with us, yet no doubt the actual tendency to sin is increased and strengthened every year a man lives in the indulgence of sin. A stone will fall towards the earth the instant you drop it from your hand, but it will fall far faster and with far greater force if it has been dropped from a great height, and has been falling for some seconds.

Let the young then lay this to heart, and strive, like young Josiah, to consecrate their earliest years to God, and to walk before Him in consistency, and in increasing conformity to their Saviour's image, all their days. I say this to all young persons, I say it especially to those who were so lately confirmed. Let others pursue their wild mad course of wickedness and folly, or their not less perilous course of indifference about God and their souls: be it your care and aim to have God for your portion; and His favour, which is better than life, for your reward; and His service, which is perfect freedom, for your happy employment all your days; and His presence, in which is the fulness of joy, for your abode for ever.

But to return to Josiah: The first particular that is recorded of his zeal for God is his setting himself to purge his kingdom from the idolatry that had overspread it. In the twelfth year of his reign, that is, in the twentieth year of his age, "he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places," etc. (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3-7.) Thus he set himself to root out idolatry from his kingdom, and not from his own kingdom only, but from the adjoining country which had formerly been the habitation of the

ten tribes, and in which the remnants of them still dwelt. In all this Josiah's conduct was such as indicated a thorough zeal for God.

His next step that we read of was to repair the house of the Lord which had been suffered to fall into decay, while the people had been building altars and setting up images to their false gods all over the land. He was resolved to serve the Lord, and the Lord only.

I must not stay now to enlarge further upon Josiah's care to put the house of God in fit and seemly order; I will only remark in passing, that where there is a real zeal for God, that zeal will shew itself, if it have opportunity, in a regard even for the outward decency and propriety of God's house and service. It is an ill sign, if we think any thing good enough in these respects.

Josiah then, as we have seen, set himself to repair the house of God, which had been suffered to fall into decay. While the work was going on, a circumstance happened, which gave a fresh occasion for putting his religion to the test. A book was found in a neglected corner of the temple. This was no other than the book of the Law, the Scriptures, or at any rate an important part of the Scriptures, so far as they were then written. There it had lain neglected and forgotten; insomuch that neither the high priest who found it, nor the king to whom it was brought, seemed ever to have seen it before. And yet it was the business of every priest to be thoroughly acquainted with it; and it was the king's duty to write out a copy of it for his own use, and to read in it daily. No wonder, when God's law was thus thrown into a corner, and lay there unopened and unread, that wickedness overspread the land. It would be the same among ourselves, if that blessed book should ever come to be dealt with in like manner.

The book which had been found was brought to the king, and the king had it read to him. And when he heard what was written in it—heard, for instance, how it both foretold and condemned the iniquity which had overspread the land, and denounced God's heavy judgments upon the guilty—he rent his clothes, in token of his deep concern; and he sent his servants, saying, "Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me," etc. (2 Kings xxii. 13).

Here then, was a still further proof of Josiah's sincerity, and perhaps the surest proof which we have yet seen—his deep reverence for God's word, and his conscientious quickness in applying it to himself. Considering the zeal which he had shewn in putting down idolatry and in repairing the house of God, he might have been ready to think, At any rate I have nothing to fear from these threatened judgments. But no: he sees, at a glance, that they are hanging over (and to all appearance he has no other feeling than that they are justly hanging over) both himself and his people.

We are not left to our own conjectures, however, to discover how far Josiah's reverence for God's word was sincere, and how far it was an evidence that his heart was right with God. The answer which was brought him from the Lord, when he sent to enquire concerning the words of the book which had been found, while it threatened Jerusalem and its inhabitants with all the fearful judgments foretold therein, as the sure punishment of the sins of which they had been guilty, contained a gracious message for Josiah: "But to the king of Judah, which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel," etc. (2 Kings xxii. 18-20).

Josiah was one of those, whom God elsewhere describes as poor and of a contrite spirit, and who tremble at God's word, and whom in an especial manner He regards and crowns with His favour.

Nor was the deep concern which Josiah manifested merely a matter of passing feeling,—the excitement of the moment, such as many have while they are listening to the word read or preached, and think, because they have it, that it is a sign of good; but which wears off presently, and has no real and lasting effect upon their character and conduct. The whole of Josiah's life, from that time to the day of his death, shewed what a deep hold the word of God had taken of his heart, how thoroughly he had accepted it as his guide and counsellor, how resolved he was, and how he acted according to his resolution, that it should be his only standard of duty and rule of conduct. And by God's blessing he was enabled to do very much towards cleansing the land from the mass of pollution, which, during the reigns of the kings that had gone before him, had been accumulating. But, alas! acceptable as his endeavours were in God's sight, Judah had gone too far in sin to be recovered, without the severe discipline of those heavy judgments which were ere long to burst upon it. The land must be laid waste, and the temple levelled with the ground, and the people carried into captivity, and schooled

there for seventy years, till they should learn to know and reverence the God of their fathers.

God shewed His mercy and loving-kindness towards Josiah, by removing him from the world before these judgments came. His end might seem, in the eyes of those who look only at the outside of things, by no means a desirable one. He died in battle, and that in the flower of his age. But God seeth not as man seeth. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." An early death is no token of God's displeasure; it may be a mark of His love. In Josiah's case it was so beyond a doubt. Happy are they who are living as Josiah lived, making it their one main care to serve God and do His will, to be found in the path of duty, and in the way of God's providence; and all the while resting their hopes of acceptance with God, not on their faithfulness, not their sincerity, nor their zeal, nor any thing else of their own, but simply and entirely on Christ's merits. To them death, come when it may, and awful as it must be to all who view it seriously, need have no real terrors. For the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, Who giveth them the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amaziah

BY REV. J. T. DAVIDSON, D.D.

"He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," etc.—2 Chronicles xxv. 2.

Amaziah was twenty-five years of age when he succeeded to the throne. As a boy he had been conscientious and well-behaved. Josephus says, "He was exceeding careful of doing what was right, and this when he was very young." From the express mention of his mother's name, both here and in the Book of Kings, I fancy she was a good and pious woman; and that her faithful training had much to do with the early promise he gave of a useful and honourable career. Many a time, I dare say, Jehoaddan (for such was her name) would take her son aside, and in fervent prayer commend him to the God of his fathers, and tell him of the heroic deeds of some of his saintly ancestors, and point out to him the responsibilities which, in future years, would devolve upon him. Oh, who can estimate the influence of a godly mother!

The first thing that Amaziah did when he was settled on the throne was to avenge the murder of his father Joash. A cruel conspiracy had been framed by the servants of the palace, and they had slain the king upon his bed. His son could not rest until these miscreants had been brought to justice. If he had carried out the vindictive practices of his own time, he would have destroyed their families too; but he called to mind an enactment in the law of Moses, to the effect that children should not be made to suffer for the sins of their fathers, and he spared them alive.

Now this showed that he was not unfamiliar with his Bible, and that he was anxious to be just as well as just. Had he not been acquainted with the Mosaic law, and had he not had some elements of goodness in his heart, he would, no doubt, have swept off the face of the earth, root and branch, the whole families of those who had taken his father's life.

The great exploit of his reign was a military campaign against the Edomites. The country of Edom bordered on Palestine, and in the days of King Jehoshaphat was subject to Judah: but for some time the people had successfully revolted, and Amaziah was seized with the ambition to reduce them to obedience again, and so to extend the glory of his kingdom.

There does not appear to have been any necessity for this war. Like most wars, it sprang out of greed and the lust for power. No doubt Amaziah would find some pretext for it; kings and governments always manage this. But the simple fact was, he wished to be a bigger man, and to have a wider empire; so he set to work to gather a magnificent army with which to invade and capture the land of Edom. "Annexation" is the word. We know a little about it in our own time. If a certain region of the world, desirable for political or commercial reasons, is weak and ill-governed, and a sort of "no-man's-land," we feel it our duty to "annex" it, which, in some instances, is neither

less nor more than a piece of national larceny. Well, Amaziah, having taken this job in hand, resolved he would make it a success; so, in addition to his own army, consisting of 300,000 chosen men, he hired from his neighbour Joash, the king of Israel, 100,000 soldiers, all "mighty men of valour."

For this he agreed to pay a hundred talents of silver. However, when the expedition was all prepared, and just as he was setting out for the field of battle, a Prophet came to him, and in the name of God ordered him at once to dismiss those soldiers he had hired from the king of Israel: adding that the Lord's favour was not with them, and that they would be a source rather of weakness than of strength. Amaziah was greatly put about by this. He was most unwilling to send these stalwart men about their business, and yet he feared to disobey the Prophet. Moreover, he had already paid down a big sum for the hire of them, and that money he could not recover. "What shall we do," said he, "for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" And the Prophet answered, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

It was a trial of the king's principle and faith in God. And how did he act? What decision did he come to? He did the thing that was right. "Let the money go," he said; "we shall dispense with these Israelites, and look to God for help." So he sent the men back to their own country.

But they were much offended at being thus treated. They took it as an insult offered to them, and in passing homewards through the land of Judah, they took occasion to wreak their vengeance on the people, and wrought great mischief among them.

Having got rid of these men, Amaziah led forth his army against the Edomites, gaining a signal victory over them in the valley of Salt, where ten thousand were left dead upon the field. Other ten thousand he took as prisoners, and bringing them to the top of the steep cliffs of that rocky region, threw them over headlong, so that they were dashed to pieces.

His very success, however, proved in the long run to be his ruin. Elated with the splendid victory he had achieved, he forsok the God of his fathers. He was foolish enough to take back into his own country some of the idol gods of Edom, and wicked enough to set them up as objects of worship. Yielding himself to degrading superstition, he actually bowed himself down before these heathen deities, and burned incense unto them. On this, a Prophet came to him, and rebuked him for his gross idolatry; but this only provoked the king to rage, who bid the Prophet hold his peace, and threatened to smite him if he interfered. The man of God replied that he would indeed hold his peace, but warned the king that he had incurred the wrath of the Most High, and that his destruction was not far off.

The prediction was fulfilled, and that in a remarkable and tragic manner. Amaziah, puffed up with pride, seems to have fairly lost his head. His great victory over the Edomites gave him a thirst for further conquest. So, in a vein of insolence, he sent a challenge to the King of Israel to come and try their strength in battle. Had it been a personal duel he proposed, the case would not have been so bad; but, unfortunately, the whims of kings involve the sufferings of the innocent; and too often thousands of lives have been sacrificed to one man's capricious humour. King Joash seems to have been a bit of a wit or a wag: for he sent him back a smart and pungent reply, which must have stung Amaziah to the quick. Many a wholesome truth old Æsop told with emphasis by his witty fables; and by the quaint little story we were reading to-night, Joash read his royal brother a lesson he was in need of. He compares himself to a stately cedar of Lebanon, and Amaziah to a sorry contemptible thistle: intimating that he scorned as much to have anything to do with him, as a cedar would to affiancé his daughter to a weed. He made the pill even more bitter to swallow, by adding, that a wild beast came and trod down the thistle; the import of which it would not be difficult for the King of Judah to understand.

Josephus tells us, that, on reading this letter, Amaziah was more determined than ever to fight, and hastened to bring his army to the field; but that, as soon as his men were drawn up in battle array, a strange unaccountable panic seized them, so that they all fled in every direction, and left their king alone, who was immediately taken prisoner by the enemy. Moreover, to add to his humiliation, Joash threatened to kill him, unless he would persuade the people of Jerusalem, his own capital, to open their gates to the conqueror. This Amaziah did; but, not content therewith, Joash broke down a part of the ancient wall, and drove his chariot through the breach, leading his royal prisoner captive behind him; and not till he had rifled the king's palace, and taken away all the

costly treasures of the temple, did he set him at liberty, and return to Samaria. The end of Amaziah was a sad one. Betrayed by his own friends, who made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, he fled to the city of Lachish, but they sent after him, and slew him there. "This," adds Josephus, "was the end of the life of Amaziah, because of his innovations in religion, and his contempt of God."

I daresay it has occurred to you, as I have been recounting the story, that there was much more of what was bad than of what was good in the life of this man; and you may wonder that it is said of him in our text, that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

Something must be allowed, of course, for the times in which he lived, and for the contrast with kings greatly worse than himself; but there were not wanting certain good elements about him; and had he not given way to a haughty temper and ambitious pride, his career might have been a useful and a happy one. He was acquainted with the Scriptures, and paid respect to the ordinances of religion; he had the desire to live a virtuous and godly life; but the secret of his failure was, that his heart was not right with God. His goodness was superficial, and therefore artificial; it was not the outcome of a regenerate nature.

It was not because Amaziah was not sinless, that his life proved such a failure, but because he was not thorough-going in his principle and piety.

Let this be the lesson we bear away with us. No lesson more needed. English life at present seems to be afflicted with a plague of levity. There is so much hollowness and unreality, so much veneer in character and work, that it behoves us to preach aloud the gospel of thoroughness. A short time ago some workmen were engaged in trying to remove a piece of old London wall. They tried with hammers, then with pick-axes, then they had to borrow the help of some stalwart navvies, but to no purpose, the wall seemed to smile at all their efforts; at last they were obliged to have recourse to boring, and blowing it up like a piece of solid rock. That is hardly the way they build now-a-days, for a man might almost push over some of our brick walls with his hand.

Now, this is just an illustration of what I mean, the want of thoroughness in every branch of industry and in every walk of life. When a man's own character is not solid, real, permeated through and through with Christian principle, you cannot have any guarantee of the genuineness of his work. They say that if you send to Birmingham an old copper coal-scuttle, a sovereign, and a galvanic battery, they will send you back a thousand pounds' worth of gold plate. Brummagem work is not confined to such articles as these. Shams abound everywhere. Gilt and paint carry the day. Ours is an age of tinsel.

And the worst of it is that this unrealness characterises much of the religion amongst us. I sometimes meet with a horrible form of Antinomianism, which virtually says, "Anything will do for me, I am a disciple of Christ": and so the work is actually more slovenly and imperfect because the individual claims to be "not under the law, but under grace." Why, it is almost as monstrous as the proposal a good young man made to his landlady, that his own excellent Christian example should serve in lieu of weekly payment for his lodgings!

A man—I don't care who he is—dishonours Christ, when any other person is put to disadvantage by his piety. If you imagine you are more free to do slipshod work because you are a Christian, I say, it is precisely the reverse. It is just because you claim to be the Lord's that any sort of work will not do. Bearing His name, you are responsible to Him for every detail of your daily life. If your secular duties are more imperfectly discharged because you are a believer, you do great wrong to the Redeemer. If you snatch a little of your employer's time to scatter tracts, or prepare for a Sabbath class, or even to read your Bible; or if, in business hours, your thoughts are so given to spiritual themes that you cannot do justice to your work, in any of these cases you do real harm to religion. A man's piety is of the true sort only when it helps to make him—if an artisan, a better workman; if in an office, a better clerk; if behind the counter, a better salesman, than he would have been without it. Our religion is given us to be a universal blessing, to sharpen our faculties, to quicken our diligence, to increase our likelihood of success.

If you have the grace of God in your heart, as the spring of your whole life, you have the promise of the first Psalm, "And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." You have the guarantee of the highest of all success. This may not always mean earthly abundance and ease; for it sometimes happens that a man's best days are those in which he has

the least of the world's smile; but if your heart is right with God, all must be well; and we know who has said that "the little that a righteous man hath is better than the abundance of many wicked."

Remember, then, that religion is something within you, working outward from the centre, and that centre a heart possessed by the grace of God. It is not, as too many imagine it, a reformation commencing in the outer circumference of one's life and habits, and then working its way inwards to the core till the heart is reached and changed; nay, but it takes its start in the innermost recesses of our being, and from thence reaches outwards, till the whole character and conduct are brought under its blissful sway.

Uzziah

BY REV. J. T. DAVIDSON, D.D.

"He was marvellously helped till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to destruction."—2 Chronicles xxvi. 15.

Uzziah was one of the greatest of the kings of Judah, and reigned longer than any other monarch; and whether you look to the variety of his accomplishments, or the extent of his territory, or the beneficence of his rule, he is only second to the far-famed Solomon.

Now, I am, first of all, to give you a sketch, and then to draw the lessons which it yields. The subject of the sketch is King Uzziah; and, as the text suggests, I will give it in two parts, which I may entitle, (1) his "Marvellous Prosperity," and (2) his "Marvellous Presumption." We find this young man, favoured by fortune, rising step by step till he reaches the pinnacle of success; and then, in one fatal hour, giddy with his elevation, toppling over, falling right down into ignominy and ruin, and illustrating the proverb of his wise progenitor, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

I. UZZIAH'S PROSPEROUS CAREER.

"He was marvellously helped till he was strong." His good fortune, as the world would call it, dated from his seventeenth year. Although his father, Amaziah, had been hurled from the throne, and swept out of the world by the rage of the people, who could not tolerate his defiant idolatry and wickedness, yet, apparently, there was no ill-will towards the dynasty, or the young prince was decidedly popular, for no obstacle whatever was put in the way of his accession. We read in the first verse that "All the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father."

It was a trying position for a mere boy to be placed in; for the cares and responsibilities, as well as the temptations and luxuries, of a royal palace demand a ripe wisdom and strength of moral purpose rarely found at so early an age. But God's grace could qualify even so young a man for the task; and I am struck with the fact, that almost every one of the good kings of Judah was quite a youth when he succeeded to the throne. "Old men," as Elihu truly said, "are not always wise"; and young men are not always foolish. Alike in statesmanship, and art, and science, many of the greatest achievements have been wrought by men long before their prime; and what Mr. Ruskin says of art, is a truth of much wider application: "The most beautiful works have all been done in youth."

It was a great advantage to the young Uzziah, that he had the loyal attachment and confidence of his people. But what mainly guarded him from the dangers around him, and kept him steady on his throne, was a sincere piety. He was blessed with a wise and faithful friend and minister in the person of Zechariah, who was a deeply spiritually-minded man, and exercised a powerful and wholesome influence on the youthful monarch.

For a time, everything to which Uzziah put his hand turned out to be a success. He was a man of considerable energy and versatility, and had no idea of luxuriating in the soft indulgences of the palace, whilst there was work to be done for the advantage of his kingdom; and on every project he undertook fortune seemed to smile. The first thing to which he turned his attention showed his active enterprise.

On the Arabian Gulf there was a small seaport called Eloth, which had been an important commercial station in the days of Solomon, but had since then been seized by the Edomites, and allowed to fall into ruin. Uzziah recovered this town to Judah, rebuilt and fortified it, and established it as a mart for foreign trade. The next thing to which he set himself was to weaken the Philistines—those ancient enemies of his country—which he did by levelling several of their fortresses to the ground, and constructing fortified outposts on the borders of their territory. Then he caused the Arabians to feel his might, and the Mehunims, and compelled the Ammonites to pay tribute to him. So that there was no want of pluck about him. It is the greatest mistake in the world to suppose that godliness is unfavourable to a robust manliness and energy of character—that a pious young man must, as a matter of course, be a sheep, or a “ninny,” or a fool. It is religion that supplies not only the loftiest motives, but the mightiest and steadiest impulse; and whether a man be a king, a warrior, a clerk, or a ploughman, whatever work he takes in hand will be more effectively done, if he is under the control of an earnest piety.

But Uzziah did not confine his energies to operations abroad. He repaired the walls of Jerusalem, and fixed upon them formidable engines of war, making the capital strong against hostile assault.

Nor was his taste entirely military in its character. I think more of him as I read of his efforts to promote agriculture, for there is not one of the ancient kings of whom this is so expressly recorded. See what the tenth verse states: “He built towers in the desert”—that was for the protection of travelling merchants, and of the peasantry—“and digged many wells; for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains; husbandmen also, and vinedressers in the mountains, and in Carmel; for he loved husbandry.”

So that, altogether, he was a clever, enterprising, busy, practical man; just the sort of man to advance the arts of civilisation, to develop a country's resources, and further its prosperity. And, indeed, this is what he did; for under his reign the kingdom of Judah reached a more prosperous condition than it had known since the time of Solomon; and, as the fifteenth verse informs us, the reputation of Uzziah spread far abroad to foreign lands.

Up to this point he had had an even run of success. I have said that fortune smiled on him at every turn; but did I mean what men commonly call “good luck,” this chapter would give me many a rebuke, for again and again we are reminded where the secret of his prosperity lay. It was God Who “made him to prosper” we are told in verse 5; again in verse 7, “God helped him against the Philistines”; and once more in our text, “He was marvellously helped till he was strong.”

II. HIS MARVELLOUS PRESUMPTION.

“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.” It requires special grace to keep a man right when he has had a career of unbroken prosperity. Nothing tries a man so much as the favour of fortune and the flattery of the world. The godly Richard Cecil, having learnt, regarding a young man of his acquaintanceship, that he had lately been very successful in business, and had been amassing a considerable amount of money, called upon him, and, on entering, remarked, “I understand, sir, you are in a very dangerous state.” “I am not aware of it,” replied the youth, astonished to be thus addressed. “Probably you are not,” rejoined Mr. Cecil, “and, therefore, I have called upon you. I hear you are getting rich; take care, for it is the road by which the devil leads hundreds to destruction.”

I do not know whether Uzziah's good and faithful minister Zechariah was now dead; but if not, I cannot doubt that he often warned the king of the snare into which he was liable to fall; unhappily, however, such warning, if given, was unheeded. Trampling on one of the strictest enactments of the Jewish law, which limited the priestly offices to consecrated persons of the tribe of Levi, Uzziah dared to enter into the most holy place of the temple, and to burn incense on the sacred altar. Not satisfied with being king, he must be high priest too. Perhaps he was tempted to imitate the heathen sovereigns around him, who generally were supreme in matters religious as well as civil; anyhow, nothing would content the elated monarch short of fulfilling the highest function of the priestly office. Horror-struck with his profanity, Azariah, the real priest, with a band of faithful coadjutors, entreated him to go out of the sanctuary. But Uzziah was not to be talked to thus; he persevered in his impious attempt; when, suddenly, an awful judgment from Heaven arrested him; he was smitten with a loathsome leprosy;

and in terror and dismay, rushed forth from the courts he had desecrated.

Of that terrible affliction he never recovered. Compelled, of course, to live in a separate house, he was cut off from society, and shut out from any enjoyment of the wealth he had gathered; and thus he ended his day a wretched outcast from his fellow-men, and even denied a place of burial in the sepulchre of the kings.

III. THE NOTE OF WARNING.

As there are many kinds of prosperity, so there are many kinds of presumption, and I am sure you will not take it amiss, if I caution you against one or two of them.

1 The pride of money. It does not take a large fortune to make some people "purse-proud"—and very disagreeable people these are. They have risen from nothing; they are the makers of their own fortunes; and so they toss their heads, and put on airs, as though it was the greatest condescension to take notice of those who were once their playmates. I have known of young men who have come up from the country to London with not more than a couple of half-crowns in the world, and they got into a good niche, and advanced from step to step, until in a few years they were rich men; but I observed they took good care not to tell us anything about their father's two-roomed cottage, or their mother's spinning-wheel; they were far too fine now to go to the Dissenting chapel they once attended; and as for their accent, it had become such a queer mixture, no man on earth could say where they came from.

Now that is very small, very contemptible; but, after all, it is just poor human nature, and we are all liable to it in some form or other. They say in America, that in Boston, where they worship literature, the question is, "How much does he know?" In Philadelphia, where they worship rank, it is, "Who was his father?" And in New York, where they worship the dollar, it is, "How much is he worth?" But if you estimate a man by his money, or by his birth, or even by his learning, it does not say much for your own judgment. "The man's the gowd for a' that."

Although Solomon declares that "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them," we are not to imagine that a prosperous career necessarily leads to moral or spiritual ruin, for "God is able to make you stand"; and, happily, we can point to instances in which, with money pouring like a flood into a man's lap, he has remained as humble and ostentatious as before, and has used his wealth to noble purpose.

2. The pride of intellect. I wish to put you on your guard against a current which is running very strong in our day. I mean the tendency to set up the reason against religion. Many of you are acquainted with young men—clever fellows perhaps they are—who have given up Christianity altogether, alleging that their cultured understanding compels them to reject it. We have had such men here, once members of the Church, and teachers in our Sunday School, but now, through pride of intellect, "lifted up to their destruction." They fancied themselves able to grapple with problems far beyond their reach. They thought they ought to understand everything, and so, because they could not, they would believe nothing. Oh, this is a terrible curse to a man! It brings darkness and misery unutterable. Doubt and unbelief, once sprung, are well nigh ineradicable. The most wretched men I know are the men who have cast off their faith. Remember, their position is a very weak one, and easily assailed. There is much more for revelation than against it. Truth shines by its own light; and even the internal evidence which the Bible affords to the ingenuous mind that studies it, is alone sufficient to silence the caviller. Do not apologise to the doubter; it is his place to apologise to you. The man who seeks to rob you of your faith does you an infinitely greater wrong than he who tries to rob you of your purse or property. It is pitiful to see a Christian professor wincing before a blatant, loud-voiced scoffer, as though with a craven fear that the would-be philosopher is right, and the believer without firm ground to stand on.

Taking even the lowest ground, see whether infidelity or Christian faith brings most human happiness. Contrast the labours, say of Voltaire or Paine, with those of John Wesley. Can it be said with truth of either of the two former that he has made any man happier or better? Yet who will deny that, through the instrumentality of the latter, thousands and tens of thousands have had a brightened life and a peaceful death? Oh, by all means use the brains that God has given you; think and study all you can; let your intellectual powers have full sway; but let a humble piety hold the guiding rein, lest, lifted up with pride, you fall through the error of the wicked.

3 Pride of wit. Now I go in for a sunny, cheerful religion. God has put within us a faculty of mirthfulness, which He did not mean us to suppress. There is no necessary

connection between dulness and piety, between a long face and a new heart. They are no friends of religion who seem to teach that it is a sin to laugh. True, but there are some men who are hardly ever serious. They must turn everything into a jest. No matter how solemn the theme, they will have their joke and their fun. Now, when wit and humour are kept in their proper place, they are salutary—they lighten labour, and help to make the wheels of life run smoothly. But it is possible to indulge this faculty in such a way as to bring much detriment to the soul. There are subjects which should always be handled in a grave and reverent spirit. Puns and quibbles are entirely out of place when religion is the theme. Never, under any circumstances, use the language of Scripture in jest. I have known men, smart young fellows, with whom this became a terrible snare. The wit, no doubt, is a general favourite. He moves like a comet, and in the darkest quarters throws out his sparkling scintillations. But, like a comet, he is not a safe companion, and, ten to one, having made awkward hits, will suddenly dart off into dark vacuity. Be it yours, rather, to resemble the quiet star, that shines with calm and steady light, nor ever becomes eclipsed till it melts away into the light of morn.

Dear friends, I must not keep you longer. I trust Uzziah has taught us all a wholesome lesson. We are all apt to grow vain. We are all very easily uplifted. If it is not money, or talent, or success, or learning, which lifts us up, it will be something else. Satan is sure to find our weak point, and tempt us there.

Where, then, is our place of security? I pause not a moment to answer—at the foot of the Cross. A look of the crucified Saviour is enough to empty the vainest man of his pride. That sight shows sin enough in us to sink us to the lowest hell. But, oh! it tells of mercy too. Amid the mountains of our sin there rolls the grand song of redemption, pardon for all sin, cleansing for all pollution, light for all darkness, healing for all disease.

Jehoiakim

BY REV. JULIUS LLOYD, M.A.

"He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David."—Jeremiah xxxvi. 30.

We read in these words the final doom of the kings of Judah. Warning after warning had been given in vain by the mouth of God's Prophets. Miraculous signs of God's mercy and truth had also been given in vain. For more than a century judgment had been impending. The Northern Kingdom was swept away, while Hezekiah was reigning at Jerusalem; and the holy city was spared at that time in answer to his intercession. His son Manasseh, who fell into idolatry, was actually taken captive to Babylon, and restored on his humble repentance, as one brought back from the dead. So the idea of a Babylonian captivity was familiar to the Jews, long before it was realized for the whole nation. The final catastrophe was hastened by the iniquity of Amon, who chose to imitate the sins, and not the amendment, of his father Manasseh. After Amon's death, a gleam of light shone upon the land of Israel, when his son Josiah restored the worship of Jehovah with unprecedented zeal. For a time the reformation was complete. But the defeat and death of Josiah at Megiddo left the kingdom in jeopardy. His sons were unfit to take his place, and had short inglorious reigns, as vassals of their powerful neighbours, Egypt or Babylon. Nevertheless, when the eldest, Jehoiakim, was placed on the throne, God declared by the Prophet Jeremiah that He would recall His sentence against Judah, if the prince and people would amend their ways (ch. xxvi.). This was the last appeal, and it was rejected with scorn, as we read in the chapter from which my text is taken.

It is one of those vivid pictures of the Bible which can never be forgotten. The king sat in his winter palace, probably the same of which we are told that he built it with cedar, and adorned it with ivory and vermillion, compelling workmen to labour, and defrauding them of their wages (ch. xxii.). As he sat there over the fire, surrounded by his counsellors, a roll of prophecy, written by Baruch at the dictation of Jeremiah, was brought in. It set forth the Lord's invitation to repentance, the Lord's threat of captivity. The king took the roll, cut it piecemeal with his penknife, and cast the shreds into the fire. Two of his counsellors remonstrated, but he would not listen to

them. The rest looked on calmly at the king's impious act. A sort of infatuation seemed to possess them, as if they defied God to fulfil His curse.

The good king Josiah was not long dead, yet his work and example were forgotten already. His reign had been too short. Old men were still living who had assisted in the "provocations of Manasseh," his Moloch sacrifices and sorceries, and had continued to take part in the fascinating orgies of Syrian paganism before Josiah grew up to manhood. For them the reformation of Judah was a new thing, to which they were not yet reconciled. It had passed over the land like a fire, consuming the idolatry which was on the surface, but leaving its root untouched. The foul weeds of the same stock sprang up again after Josiah's death, and nowhere more rankly than in the courts of his own palace. Each of his three sons is described in Holy Scripture with the same sentence, "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."

It may have been that Josiah, like many great sovereigns and rulers, neglected his own household in zeal for the public good. At all events, his son Jehoiakim's character shows all the signs of extreme indulgence, as if he had never known any law but his own will. Such a selfish character is sometimes produced by the reaction of nature against too much severity: sometimes it is the result of passions left to run wild. It is in either case a profitable study. Jehoiakim's conduct is, indeed, beyond the wickedness of ordinary men. But the worst sins are seldom anything more than glaring instances of common sins. The temptations of royalty are sufficient of themselves to magnify faults into vices. For kings are but human, and their high position makes their faults not only more conspicuous but more calamitous; while it removes them from the control of society, without increasing their power of self-control. This is especially the case with faults of unbridled passion. We may regard the conduct of Jehoiakim, and the terrible retribution which followed, as a lesson written large for our instruction.

Scripture shows the selfish king at his worst. We see clearly his insolence, his heartless neglect of the unpaid labourers who had built his house, his cruelty to the Prophets who warned him of his duty. In common life such bad features of selfishness are often concealed. It wears an aspect so genial and fascinating, that it passes for good-nature. So in our English history, Charles II. won the hearts of all who approached him by his charm of manner, and made it hard to believe how unfeeling he really was. So we may see at college a brilliant youth, handsome, free and merry, who is followed by an admiring circle as he hurries with reckless extravagance from one pleasure to another; while in the background, almost forgotten, are the unpaid tradesmen whom he has defrauded, the parents whose hearts he is breaking, the sisters whom he has impoverished, the friends whose letters of advice he has torn in pieces, and thrown unread into the fire.

On he goes, in his fast career, like those riderless horses of Rome, which are adorned with gay trappings, and set to run their race along the Corso between crowds of applauding people. On either side voices urge them on, and their speed is hastened as they move, by goads, which hang loose on their sides, and swing with their motion. Woe for them and for the people, if they leap their barrier! In pleasure or in pain, they have no thought except for themselves alone.

The world is very lenient to characters of this kind. Shakespeare, whose plays are a mirror of the world, shows marked partiality for Henry V. whose selfishness in youth and manhood was ill compensated by his valour. Yet he has shown the sorrows which Henry brought on his father by his wild youth, and the miseries which his ambition brought on France and England.

Even the most generous natural impulses, without the government of conscience, leave a man like a high-mettled horse without a rider. Affection and desire are as spurs to his hot blood, urging him to swerve this way or that. If this be so in the most highly favoured of the children of men, in an Alexander, for instance, how much more vicious is self-indulgence in baser natures? For one who is led astray by generous impulse, a hundred are misled by such passions as covetousness, envy, luxury, and sloth. And then, as years go on, character hardens. The youthful charm which veils a selfish mind soon fades away, and its aim becomes more concentrated on a fixed purpose. A thoroughly selfish man loses the warmth and brightness, and play of kindly emotions, which he had when he was younger; and, if he is religious, his selfishness penetrates even into his religion. There is a kind of religion, which, under Christian forms, ministers to selfish interest; a faith without love, which seeks assurance for one's own soul, and is rigid in condemnation of the errors and faults of one's brethren. Such was

the religion of Louis XIV. in his old age, a persecuting religion, without humility, righteousness, or charity.

But the consistent outcome of selfishness is to turn away from the worship of the true God, and set up an idol after one's own heart, an idea of God which reflects one's baser self. A man's God is in effect his own ideal of goodness. So, among the heathen, cruel, foul, and licentious men ever chose to worship cruel, foul, and licentious deities.

From the spectacle of idolatry which Ezekiel saw a few years later, in the Temple of Jerusalem, it appears that Jehoiakim took this last step. Ezekiel describes with horror (ch. viii.), a vision of the Temple profaned by "Every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about": women weeping for Tammuz, and men bowing themselves in worship of the Sun. Thus Jehoiakim filled up the cup of his iniquity. Having imprisoned and slain the Lord's prophets, and burned the inspired message of prophecy, he turned to gross idolatry, his people consenting. But the roll which he destroyed was replaced by another, containing the same words as before, with a terrible addition: "Thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim King of Judah, He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost." Neither of his two miserable successors completed their reign. One after another was taken in chains to Babylon, and the kingdom of Judah came to an end.

Jeremiah foretells the downfall of Jehoiakim as a judgment of God upon him for his wickedness. "Thy father," he said, "judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? saith the Lord." But the moral lesson of this history is incomplete, like other moral lessons of the Old Testament, unless we look forward to the revelation of the New Testament.

After the lapse of 600 years, years of anxious hope and waiting through much affliction, the throne of David was restored in a marvellous manner. Another King arose, of Whom it was declared before His birth, "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end." This later King was anointed, not with sacramental oil, but with the Holy Ghost: enthroned, not on an earthly seat of ivory and gold, but at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having all power in Heaven and earth. Thus in His royal dignity the true heir of David, our Saviour Jesus Christ, fulfilled that which was prophesied of Him, when David in spirit called Him "Lord." But the contrast in His Majesty is not more striking than the contrast in His life. For the life of our Lord upon earth set an example the very reverse of that which was displayed by Jehoiakim and the other weak tyrants who prepared their nation's ruin. Jehoiakim had been all for self; covetous, unjust, cruel, profane, all to gratify his selfish will. Christ was purely unselfish. "He went about doing good." His delight was to do His Father's will, and to bind up the broken-hearted. There is a passage in St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, which may remind us of the roll of prophecy written by Jeremiah. St. Paul speaks of a handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and he says, Christ blotted it out, and "took it away, nailing it to His Cross." By the sacrifice of Himself, He removed our sentence of condemnation.

In this contrast we read plainly the lesson, that self-indulgence is the way to destruction, and that self-sacrifice is the way to life eternal. It is a lesson for all, but especially for the young, who stand at the dividing of roads, and are free to take the broad or narrow way. The choice is before you, with the awful responsibility of freedom. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

A day of judgment awaits us all.

When, shrivelling like a parched scroll,
The flaming heavens together roll.

How shall we stand in that day, brethren? What ark will save us from the fiery flood? Scripture answers the question: "I saw a new Heaven and a new earth. . . And I saw the holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven." Thus the glorified Church of Christ will survive the ruin of this present world.

Trust in Him, and endeavour to follow in His steps. Beware of making weakness an apology for selfishness. When a young man has no principles, and only passions, unwise friends will say in excuse for him that he is weak. So he is, doubtless, but the Apostle Paul bids us "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," and

thereby teaches us that by the help of God, we can be strong. We are never allowed to incur temptation, without spiritual grace being given us to resist it. The Angels of grace that preserved Joseph in Egypt, and Daniel in Babylon, are ready to guard every soul that looks to Christ for salvation.

Jehoiachin

BY REV. ALEXANDER RAMSAY, B.D.

"As I live, saith the Lord," etc.—Jeremiah xxii. 24-27.

It is probable that the name of Coniah calls up no association in our minds. Readers and students of Scripture though we are, we should be in sore straits were we to be asked what we know of him. Yet three books of the Bible bemoan his fate; and he receives in Jeremiah repeated mention. We read here this prophecy concerning him; Ezekiel, too, has an elegy lamenting his unhappy lot, and shedding tears of pity for him. Lamentations bewails also the misfortunes that befell him. It is the story of his later days, and the kindlier fortune that then came to him, which forms the closing verses of this Book of Jeremiah, as if after the clouds and darkness a gleam of watery sunshine struggled through. Ezekiel, who was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah but spent his life in Babylon among the exiles, speaks of this king—Coniah, Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, for by all these three names he is called—as "the topmost branch of the cedar of Lebanon, carried off by a great eagle with great wings and long pinions, full of feathers which had divers colours," under which image he means, of course, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; and this same Prophet's voice breaks with emotion, as he laments for Jehoiachin as "the young lion whose voice will be no more heard on the mountains of Israel." The day when he passed into captivity was long remembered as a day of national sorrow, and remained a great date in the history; and the gate through which he left the city for the last time bore the name of this ill-fated king. Into exile the thoughts and prayers and ardent wishes of the people followed him, and they cherished the hope that he was one day to be restored to the land and throne of his fathers.

It is all the more remarkable that around the name and memory of Jehoiachin should gather so many tributes of affection since he was only king for a hundred days. He only reigned three months; and uneasy certainly was the head that wore that crown. He spent a long life-time in prison, when he was no more than a pathetic memory to his countrymen. Since then he filled so large a place in the mind of his generation and receives so frequent mention in the Prophets' pages, it will be well if we can clothe with flesh and blood this pale, spectral figure, which is all that is left to us of the man who for a few troubled months was king in Jerusalem.

I. JEHOIACHIN WAS A MAN WHOSE REIGN BEGAN IN FOLLY.

His father in a fit of midsummer madness had refused to pay his annual tribute to Babylon, and so had made another bid for the independence of his kingdom. Three years had elapsed, and the unhappy land of Judah had been ravaged by marauding bands, instigated by Babylon to work their will on the daring rebel kingdom. Jerusalem was crowded with fugitives who had fled to the security of the capital from the unsettled country, where neither life nor property was worth an hour's purchase. Now it was known that Nebuchadnezzar himself was on the march to punish the insult offered to his power. At this juncture Jehoiakim king of Judah died. He did not see the ruin that his mad and infatuated policy of rebellion had brought on his kingdom. All this while Jeremiah had maintained his solitary and unavailing protest. The king was his sworn foe, and the Prophet's fortunes were at the lowest ebb. He was ever the object of persecution: now he is in the stocks, now he is in prison, and now he is in concealment.

But when Jehoiakim died there was a chance for the new king. It is true he was but eighteen years old when in these critical circumstances he succeeded his father; and the sands were running out in the hour-glass. But at any rate he had not been guilty of the breach of the covenant with Babylon; and had he made an instant submission to the conqueror, he might have saved his country from the imminent invasion and red ruin, and his capital from being sacked, and his people from captivity. This was the only course of wisdom open to him, and there cannot be any doubt that it was

the policy urged on him by Jeremiah. But he and his counsellors would not listen to reason; they let this last chance of safety for Judah slip past them; and they determined instead to prosecute the war with fresh energy. It seems likely that over the bands of guerilla soldiers, belonging to neighbouring tribes, they gained some successes. The great army, however, headed by the mighty king himself, was bound to crush them, as the cart-wheel crushes the worm that chancs to be in its track.

Now when you turn to the history in Kings you will find it said of Jehoiachin that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done," and when we remember that this unhappy prince was but a youth of eighteen, and that he only reigned for three months, that seems a very harsh judgment to stand on the page of history. Here also in this oracle of the Prophet there seems a sternness of tone, although pity for the hapless king mingles in the Prophet's mood towards him. The explanation is that this verdict of condemnation was passed in view of the frenzy and recklessness of this fresh energy of rebellion, which precipitated his country's fate. If some hot-headed rajah of a protected Indian state were to revolt against the English Sovereignty, and plunge his unhappy people in all the misery of a hopeless war, we should applaud any patriot who condemned such wilful folly.

It is indeed sad and pitiful that of the four kings of the house of Josiah, who sat on the throne of Judah in those days when the kingdom was tottering to its tragic fall, the condemnation has to be written that "they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Of each one of them the same monotonous refrain of judgment has to be spoken. Yet three of them were sons of Josiah, and one was his grandson; and of Josiah the same historian is able to say that "like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might." Why was it that out of such piety came forth such wickedness? Some there are who will tell you that this is not unusual, and will give you examples of those who have been reared in godly homes, and who in their lives have flung from them all restraint, and been distinguished only by an excess of evil. Every one knows that such sad examples occur; but the truth is they are the marked exceptions, and the rule is all the other way: they attract attention, and we misjudge the small proportion they are. The fact is that early traing is the most potent factor in the making of character; and that a godly home is the richest inheritance to which any man can be born. There is a succession in piety and uprightness; there is an entail in the Kingdom of God. Why then is this house of Josiah so ignominious and disgraceful? Why do these sons rise up and flout their father's memory? The explanation lies in the tone and temper of the society of their sad time; in the degradation of religion and dissolution of morals, in the debasing superstitions that had vogue. They breathed a vitiated atmosphere; Jeremiah was a voice crying in the wilderness, and alas! they heeded not this one man who could have taught them righteousness.

II. JEHOIACHIN WAS A MAN WHOSE LIFE WAS ONE LONG TRAGEDY.

He was nominally the last king of Judah, for another succeeded him on what was only the apology for a throne; but actually his reign ended the succession of those who filled the throne of David. And but for three months did he wear his crown. His brief reign ended in an unconditional capitulation to the Babylonian conqueror and in his own captivity. With him was carried away the very flower of the nation. All the nobles and men of substance, all who had formed the backbone of the army, a multitude of skilled craftsmen, in all some 10,000 men, besides women and children, were transported to Babylon. Nearly all the worth and piety of the land were found in that company of exiles. Families were torn asunder. There was mourning and lamentation in all the land. The night of Zion's bondage had come. The temple was despoiled of its treasures. The palace was ransacked. The loot taken went to swell the conqueror's booty. That year, 597 B.C., was a year of bitter sorrow for Jerusalem. The flowers of her forest were all "wede away." Jehoiachin fared most hardly of all, for while the exiles were allowed to found colonies and transact business and establish homes by the rivers of Babylon, the unhappy king was left to languish in a Chaldean prison. For seven and thirty years he dragged out a miserable existence in this dungeon, until through an act of grace he was released. He passed within these gloomy walls in the first bloom of youth, a brave, eager prince of some eighteen summers; and he crept out of his cell a broken, haggard old man of fifty-five in premature decay. Was he not "a despised, broken vessel"—this last legitimate king of Judah? Jeremiah speaks of him as the signet ring on the right hand of God plucked off and cast away, to emphasise the

eminence from which he fell. To that mighty prince Nebuchadnezzar the poor throne of Judah may have seemed a very petty elevation; but to every devout Israelite there was a divinity that hedged about his king. He was the anointed of the Lord, heir of David and Solomon, patron and champion of the temple; he dwelt under the very shadow of the Almighty. And here he was, like that precious ring flung into the mud, and trampled under the feet of cattle.

It was this lifelong martyrdom that won for him so much piety. The Prophet's sympathy overcomes his censure. He cannot find it in his mind severely to blame him, since he finds it in his heart so profoundly to pity him. When the life is thus enshrined in sorrow, when disaster has fallen and the man is crushed, charity more easily does her perfect work; we grow ready to find excuses and palliations. It is successful wrongdoing that is to be chastised with scorpions. Beside the grave we are sorry for our harshness; and the life that is closed takes on another colour in the retrospect. Memory brings to mind many a little noticed trait of worth. If only we judged with that measure we should wish to be meted out to us, we should judge a more merciful judgment.

But not only is it that trouble appeals to our sympathy: it lends often a new dignity to the life. As in death you often see a new nobleness given to the face, and the features of a lost youth reappear in that face lying so still and placid, where death has smoothed the wrinkles on the brow, and clothed it with a sense of peace which the new life never knew; so a crushing misfortune ennobles the man, and people remembered of this king not his rashness, but rather that he was a very Rupert of dash and daring, as he pined away in that prison and was denied liberty, and was never again to see his native land.

III. JEHOIACHIN'S LIFE WAS REDEEMED BY A GREAT SACRIFICE.

When Nebuchadnezzar lay before Jerusalem, he went out with his queen-mother and a procession of nobles to offer himself as a hostage. He was eager to spare the city the horrors of a siege and a sack. He laid himself on the altar for the sake of his nation. He will receive the arrow into his own breast, and shield them if he can. It is said that his father had been enticed into the conqueror's camp and basely betrayed to death; but even with this awful warning before his eyes, he will not be deterred. Come torture, come death, come exile, come imprisonment, he will unflinchingly bear it, if only his people be saved from the horrors of war. It was a noble act of sacrifice, this voluntary surrender; and it availed to gain a few years of reprieve for the temple and the city from the fate that afterwards overtook them. This he did when he was young, and life and freedom were dear to him, and when his spirit and courage must have dictated to him a death on the battlefield rather than what must have seemed an act of craven submission. This kept his memory green, and men held his name in undying remembrance.

A modern scholar has thrown a fresh halo around this king's head, for he has thrown out the conjecture that we are to find the sighing of this royal exile in those Psalms, the 42nd and 43rd, which have cheered so many despondent souls. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, Who is the health of my countenance, O my God." And if this was his song in the night, he found that "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage"; but he had, even in Giant Despair's dungeon, the key that turned in the rusty lock, and gave him full access into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And in all time of our desolation and trouble, we cannot find better cheer than this, which was the succour and solace of that royal prisoner of old.

Jehoiachin

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," etc.—2 Kings xxiv. 9.

Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah, or Coniah) was the son of Jehoiakim, and therefore the grandson of good king Josiah. But he followed his father, not his grandfather; "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done."

But he had little time, while he reigned alone, for doing either good or evil, for after

his father's death his reign lasted only three months. He is said to have been eighteen years old when he began to reign; but in the Chronicles (2 Chron. xxxvi. 9) he is said to have been but eight. It appears that for ten years he reigned jointly with his father. It is not likely that he had any great influence then. So that, when he is said to have done evil like his father, we may understand that while his father lived nothing was done by the son against the father's idolatrous practices, and that during the short time he reigned alone they were still continued. "That which was evil in the sight of the Lord," here as elsewhere, refers mainly to idolatry; not so much to personal character as to the public sanction of that idolatry which was an abomination in the sight of God.

Jehoiachin does not seem to have been an active and zealous promoter of idolatry, like Jeroboam "who made Israel to sin," or Manasseh, of whom it is written that he "seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel" (2 Kings xxi. 9). He had little strength of character, even for evil. As he found things, so he let them go on. It is possible that, had he immediately succeeded Josiah, he would have continued in Josiah's ways; but two idolatrous reigns had intervened, that of his uncle Jehoahaz and that of his father Jehoiakim, and in their steps he trod.

The Prophet Jeremiah, prophesying probably during the three months of his reign, speaks of him almost with contempt. The very shortening of his name from Jeconiah to Coniah seems to show this. "Is this man *Coniah* a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure?" (Jer. xxii. 28). An idol is "nothing in the world"; but a *broken* idol (such as Dagon, 1 Sam. v. 4) is contemptible indeed! Jehoiachin himself was like a despised broken idol, and the title agreed with his sin. The idols for which he had turned away from Jehovah could do nothing for him in his need, and he himself was as powerless as they.

He reigned but three months, and then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came and besieged Jerusalem. Jehoiakim had rebelled against him, and this was the punishment of his rebellion. Jehoiachin now made no resistance, but went out to him and surrendered, with his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers. Was this from fear, or was it by the advice of Jeremiah? For Jeremiah's advice (speaking in the name of the Lord) was to yield, and go captive to Babylon. Those who obeyed (so the people were told afterwards, and probably at this time also) would fare well in the land of their captivity, and might hope to be restored to their own land, whereas those who remained would be scattered and perish. Let us hope that it was in obedience to God that Jehoiachin surrendered. Though he "did evil in the sight of the Lord," he is not spoken of as sinning in the same degree as either his father Jehoiakim or his uncle Zedekiah, who succeeded him. Jehoiakim "did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done"—even the worst of them, including Manasseh (2 Kings xxiii. 37); and of Zedekiah it is said "he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the Prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 12, 13). This seems to be put in contrast with the conduct of Jehoiachin in his surrender: Zedekiah hardened his heart, and went on to his ruin; Jehoiachin obeyed the Prophet's word, and yielded.

His mother, we read, was carried away with him; as well as his wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land; and, besides these, "all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon" (2 Kings xxiv. 16).

It was but a miserable remnant that was left. Though Mattaniah (his father's brother) was set up as king by Nebuchadnezzar (his name being changed to Zedekiah) yet the kingdom under him did but drag on a miserable existence for eleven years more, and then all came to ruin, and the great captivity began. As an independent kingdom, the kingdom of Judah may be said to have come to an end with Jehoiachin.

His mother is mentioned, and his wives, but not his children. Had he none? Not at that time, it appears. Jeremiah had prophesied thus: "O earth, earth, earth [which we may understand as O land, land, land] hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man *childless*, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. xxii. 29, 30). He had children afterwards, no less than seventy in number, born in the land of his captivity (1 Chron. iii. 17, 18), and another, Salathiel,

called his son, appears in the genealogy of our Lord (Matt. i. 12) where he is mentioned as having been born "after they were brought to Babylon"; but none of his sons ever came to the throne.

His mother's name is given, "Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem." May we think that she had any influence for good with her son? She was no heathen woman, but a daughter of Jerusalem; and, though to be of Jerusalem in those evil times, was no sure sign of goodness, yet this woman must have known the will of God as declared by Jeremiah, and it may have been in a measure by her persuasion that Jehoiachin obeyed and yielded. He was but a youth of eighteen; at that age a mother's voice is still listened to. It is pleasant, at all events, to imagine that in the family-council held before the surrender the mother's vote was on the side of right.

But, though we may indulge *some* hope, as regards both Jehoiachin and his mother, yet it must be confessed that it is but a slender one in the face of the awful words of Jeremiah: "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon My right hand," etc. (Jer. xxii. 24-27). Words could hardly be more severe than these. Jehoiachin and his mother are spoken of, not as going out voluntarily, but as being cast out. If they went by their own will, their will was constrained by God. It is a question we cannot decide.

But what a fate for the grandson of good king Josiah! At eighteen years of age he lost his kingdom, and was carried away to Babylon, and for seven and thirty years he remained a prisoner. Thus the main part of his life was spent in captivity. He was one of the many kings whom the conqueror had dethroned, and who lived at his court as prisoners. His mother died, and children were born to him, but he was a captive still. All the prime of his life he spent in prison, a dethroned king, one among many such.

Nothing is told us of his prison-life; what his treatment was, what degree of liberty or comfort he enjoyed, or what were his thoughts. We can but conjecture his state of mind. It was a long chastisement for the sins of a short reign. Did he profit by it? As a child he must have known Josiah: did he now remember his grandfather? Did what he had known of him now come back to his mind, in contrast with his father's course, and his own? He had much time for thought—long, sad, years: did he think aright? Did he repent, and seek God? We read of a far worse king, Manasseh, his own ancestor, that he was bound with fetters, and carried to Babylon, and that "when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him" (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). May we think that Jehoiachin repented too?

The sequel gives us hope. After a long reign, during the greater part of which Jehoiachin was his prisoner, king Nebuchadnezzar died, and was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach. And now came a great change for Jehoiachin. In the first year of his reign the new king "did lift up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison; and he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon; and changed his prison garments; and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. And his allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life" (2 Kings xxv. 27-30).

When *Manasseh* repented and sought God, "the Lord was entreated of him," and allowed him time and opportunity to undo in part the evil he had done, and to restore the worship of the Lord: reasoning backwards from mercy to repentance, we may hope that the kindness shown to Jehoiachin in his later years was preceded by his repentance. For it was God Who disposed Evil-merodach to kindness, as it was from God that the mercy shown to Manasseh came. It would not be according to His usual dealings, that Jehoiachin should find peace and comfort in his last years, if he continued in hardness of heart.

Looking on Evil-merodach as God's instrument of mercy, we are less concerned with his own motives; yet it is interesting to think of the new king making it one of the earliest acts of his reign to comfort the captive king. He was but fifty-five years of age, not much past the prime of life; but thirty-seven years of captivity had, we may suppose, made him an old man before his time. True, those captive-kings were still in some respects treated as kings, for each had his throne; to have *kings* as captives increased the conqueror's glory: but they lived in a prison, and wore prison-clothes, and ate prison-food; it was no life of ease and comfort that Jehoiachin had lived for seven and thirty years, and doubtless the life had told on his looks. The eye of Evil-

merodach singled him out from the rest. He knew him to be no petty chief, like most of the others, but one of a long line of true kings; and his noble Jewish features, and grey hairs, and his worn and wasted face and figure, filled the young king of Babylon with respectful pity. There is much pathos in the words "he spake kindly to him"; it was long since the captive-king had heard words of kindness; and from that time his life was a life of plenty and ease and comparative freedom. We know not how much longer he lived; perhaps for years.

If Jehoiachin was indeed penitent, then those years were the happiest of his life. Unless his mother made it so, his childhood was not happy, with such a father as Jehoiakim; and his short reign, after he came to reign alone, was nothing but war and fear. Now he was at least safe and at peace; no longer a king, it is true, but he had found that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and this uncrowned king (practically so) was far happier without his crown; his wants were supplied, and he was treated with respect and kindness. If, besides, he had forsaken idols, and turned to the Lord, then indeed Jehoiachin's last days were by far his best and happiest.

Yet, even supposing this to have been the case, Jehoiachin, this "despised broken idol," this thirty-seven-years captive, furnishes a warning against weakness of character. For such appears to have been his character; not wicked so much as weak; not a daring rebel against God, leading others astray, but one who was himself easily led, following without resistance in the evil way in which he found himself placed.

Zedekiah

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

"Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned as king," etc.—Jeremiah xxxvii. 1.

Zedekiah was a small man on a great stage, a weakling set to face circumstances that would have taxed the strongest. He was a youth at his accession to the throne of a distracted kingdom, and if he had had any political insight he would have seen that his only chance was to adhere firmly to Babylon, and to repress the foolish aristocracy who hankered after alliance with the rival powers of Egypt. He was mad enough to form an alliance with the latter, which was constructive rebellion against the former, and was strongly reprobed by Jeremiah. Swift vengeance followed; the country was ravaged, Zedekiah in his fright implored Jeremiah's prayers and made faint efforts to follow his counsels. The pressure of invasion was lifted, and immediately he forgot his terrors and forsook the Prophet. The Babylonian army was back next year, and the final investment of Jerusalem began. The siege lasted sixteen months, and during it, Zedekiah miserably vacillated between listening to the Prophet's counsels of surrender and the truculent nobles' advice to resist to the last gasp. The miseries of the siege live for ever in the Book of Lamentations. Mothers boiled their children, nobles hunted on dung-hills for food. Their delicate complexions were burned black, and famine turned them into living skeletons. Then, on a long summer day in July came the end. The king tried to skulk out by a covered way between the walls, his few attendants deserted him in his flight, he was caught at last down by the fords of the Jordan, carried prisoner to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah away up in the north beyond Baalbec, and there saw his sons slain before his eyes, and, as soon as he had seen that last sight, was blinded, fettered, and carried off to Babylon, where he died. His career teaches us lessons which I may now seek to bring out.

I. A WEAK CHARACTER IS SURE TO BECOME A WICKED ONE.

Moral weakness and inability to resist strong pressure was the keynote of Zedekiah's character. There were good things in him; he had kindly impulses, as was shown in his emancipation of the slaves at a crisis of Jerusalem's fate. Left to himself, he would at least have treated Jeremiah kindly, and did rescue him from lingering death in the foul dungeon to which the ruffian nobility had consigned him, and he provided for his being at least saved from dying of starvation during the siege. He listened to him secretly, and would have accepted his counsel if he had dared. But he yielded to the stronger wills of the nobles, though he sometimes bitterly resented their domination, and complained that "the king is not he that can do anything against you."

Like most weak men, he found that temptations to do wrong abounded more than visible inducements to do right, and he was afraid to do right, and fancied that he was compelled by the force of circumstances to do wrong. So he drifted and drifted, and at last was smashed to fragments on the rocks, as all men are who do not keep a strong hand on the helm and a steady eye on the compass. The winds are good servants but bad masters. If we do not coerce circumstances to carry us on the course which conscience has pricked out on the chart, they will wreck us.

II. A MAN MAY HAVE A GOOD DEAL OF RELIGION AND YET NOT ENOUGH TO MOULD HIS LIFE. Zedekiah listened to the Prophet by fits and starts. He was eager to have the benefit of the Prophet's prayers. He liberated the slaves in Jerusalem. He came secretly to Jeremiah more than once to know if there were any message from God for him. Yet he had not faith enough nor submission enough to let the known will of God rule his conduct, whatever the nobles might say.

Are there not many of us who have a belief in God and a general acquiescence in Christ's precepts, who order our lives now and then by these, and yet have not come up to the point of full and final surrender? Alas, alas, for the multitudes who are "not far from the Kingdom," but who never come near enough to be actually *in* it! To be not far from *is* to be out of, and to be out of *is* to be, like Zedekiah, blinded and captived and dead in prison at last.

III. GOD'S LOVE IS WONDERFULLY PATIENT.

Jeremiah was to Zedekiah the incarnation of God's unwearied pleadings. During his whole reign, the Prophet's voice sounded in his ears, through all the clamours and cries of factions, and mingled at last with the shouts of the besiegers and the groans of the wounded, like the sustained note of some great organ, persisting through a babel of discordant noises. It was met with indifference, and it sounded on. It provoked angry antagonism, and still it spoke. Violence was used to stifle it in vain. And it was not only Jeremiah's courageous pertinacity that spoke through that persistent voice, but God's unwearied love, which being rejected is not driven away, being neglected becomes more beseeching, "is not easily provoked" to cease its efforts, but "beareth all" despite, and hopeth for softened hearts till the last moment before doom falls.

That patient love pleads with each of us as persistently as Jeremiah did with Zedekiah.

IV. THE LONG-DELAYED JUDGMENT FALLS AT LAST.

With infinite reluctance the Divine love had to do what God Himself has called "His strange work." Divine Justice travels slowly, but arrives at last. Her foot is "leaden" both in regard to its tardiness and its weight. There is no ground in the long postponement of retribution for the fond dream that it will never come, though men lull themselves to sleep with that lie. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is thoroughly set in them to do evil." But the sentence will be executed. The pleading love, which has for many returning autumns spared the barren tree and sought to make it fit to bear fruit, does not prevent the owner saying at last to his servant with the axe in his hand, "Now! thou shalt cut it down."

Jabez

BY REV. G. MARTIN CLARIS.

"Jabez was more honourable than his brethren," etc.—1 Chronicles iv. 9, 10.

These are, perhaps, the two most wonderful verses in the First Book of the Chronicles. The early chapters of this book seem full of genealogies and pedigrees, and a reader might say, "Let me skip that chapter: what good can I get from reading that Penue! was the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah?" But if we skipped it we should lose one of the most beautiful little surprise touches in Bible history. These little verses of the text are like an oasis in the desert—like a nugget of gold; and it is worth digging all over this hard genealogical soil to get at them. They are like pearls in the fields—only one pearl, perchance. We might be content to read the First and Second Books of the Chronicles through, and feel well repaid even if we got no other

thought. Or, again, the early chapters in this First Book of Chronicles seem to me like a graveyard, where sleep the dead of many generations; we can read their names on the tombstones, one by one—they are just legible. But as I look in that graveyard I can see one grave which shews more care—it is a little garden well kept—and that is the grave of Jabez, with its epitaph, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

Evidently the early life of Jabez was enveloped in a cloud; he was born in a season of sorrow, and his mother, in her sorrow, fastened her sorrow on to him for the rest of his life, and she called him Jabez, *i.e.* sorrow: "Because I bare him with sorrow." We do not know what the sorrow was; it may have been a family sorrow or a national sorrow; or some have supposed that her husband died at that time, and in memory of her husband she called her infant child by the name of Jabez. Whether this be so or not, his brethren received their names, and Jabez was called by that title in order that his mother might always have something to remind her of her trouble.

But it is not true that sorrow is often the harbinger of joy? A dull morning often brings a bright day. We have our old adage, "Rain before seven, clear before eleven." We have it again, "March comes in like a lion, and goes out like a lamb," and "A bad beginning makes a good ending." It is often that which we baptize with our tears which comes to gladden our heart in the long-run, and that which we receive with smiles often at last wrings from us tears. Was it not as Rachel was dying that she gave her infant child the name of Benoni, "the son of my sorrow," but his father altered it to Benjamin, "the son of my right hand"? Jabez's life, it seems, became fruitful in after-life because of its early showers. Just so Christ went through Gethsemane and sorrow to the Throne. His suffering preceded the glory. The valley is the high-road to the hill-top.

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." The highest Christian graces are nurtured in trial. The maidenhair fern grows most delicately in a low, shady place—in a lonely place, where it is not accustomed to receive the tear-drops as they fall from other plants which overhang it.

It is sunshine after rain—that is Jabez's life. I want you to notice that he was more honourable than his brethren, and his prayer is recorded because it was a more fervent prayer than his brethren's prayer. In Acts xvii. we are told that the Bereans were more noble than the Thessalonians, and here we have Jabez more honourable than his brethren. I am going to style him—for I know he deserves it—the Right Honourable Jabez. He has the honourable mention. Will you especially mark the reasons of his success, and his steps from sorrow to honour, and from commonalty to peerage? The Right Honourable Jabez! How does he get this title?

I. HE OVERCAME HIS DIFFICULTIES, AND HE ROSE ABOVE HIS CIRCUMSTANCES.

He was named "Jabez," which means "sorrowful." His mother pinned her sorrow on to him, which would have been to many a man a lifelong drag. But no; he felt the burden of his lot, and he was determined to conquer it. He discovered that by the grace of God a man need not be the creature of circumstances. He seemed to catch the faint glimpse coming down from the New Testament, "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." Jabez overcame his little world of trial and sorrow; whatever they were we know not; but he rose to the occasion. And if he could do it with his little light, dare we say that we can ever be hemmed in and tied down by circumstances with our blaze of twentieth-century light?

II. HE CRAVED, CLAIMED, AND WENT IN FOR A DEFINITE BLESSING.

"Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" Mark that word "*indeed*," for that is the pith of the whole sentence. Some blessings are disappointing and transient. There is fame and wealth and praise—these are very transient. But Jabez says, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" We can afford to say that, brethren, even when the blessing takes the form of tribulation, or persecution, or disappointment, or the rod. "I wot that he whom Thou blessest *is* blessed." Whether they be blessings which come from the pierced Hand of Christ, such as pardon, acceptance, life, they are blessings indeed; or whether they be blessings which come from the inworking of the Holy Spirit, such as humbling, stripping, harrowing, ploughing, or convincing, they are blessings indeed.

If you notice the margin of your Bible you will see his prayer reads thus: "Oh, if Thou wilt bless me indeed!" And then you will observe Jabez makes no rash promises, no bargain with God; he does not vow conditionally, as Jacob did when he said, "If

God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." No; Jabez makes no bargain with God. He does not say, "If God will bless me indeed, then I will do so and so"; but he puts it entirely into God's hands with a beautiful surrendered will. He puts himself entirely before God as a blank sheet of paper for God to write upon whatever He would. And this surrendered will is another step from sorrow to honour and from commonalty to peerage. "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

III. JABEZ HAD ENLARGED EXPECTATIONS AND AMBITIONS, and he cried, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and *enlarge my coast!*" Possibly his inheritance was surrounded by the Canaanites, and he had to expel them, for he wanted an increase of land.

There is one sin that we Christians are guilty of to-day, and that is, we are too self-satisfied. We may know a little smattering of rest and pardon; but do we know what the full assurance of faith is? and what perfect peace is? We may know a crucified Saviour; but do we know a risen Lord, and the power of an endless life through His resurrection, and the boundless joy and strength which come through perpetual communion with Him?

Paul had not this self-satisfied spirit, for he said, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

IV. JABEZ SOUGHT STRENGTH FOR THE WAR, and he said, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me!" Jabez knew the secret of power—the right hand of God. Have you ever watched a little boy beginning to write? He begins very cautiously, but the letters are very malformed, very shaky, and dodgy, because the pencil is too long for his hand. Then his father comes; he does not take the pencil from him and write for the boy, but he puts his hand over the child's hand to guide and strengthen that hand; and then the letters are formed properly, without any unevenness. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me!" Oh, if we can only get this mighty Hand of God over our little hand, we can do great things!

V. JABEZ HATED EVIL, and prayed to be kept from it, that it might not grieve him. Possibly the cloud that overshadowed his name was a sin, and that he dreaded sin as a burnt child always dreads the fire. Now, Jabez was to have been pinned down by his sorrow; but that very sorrow became now as a rope thrown over the throne of God to act as a pulley to pull him upwards towards the peerage. His desire was that God's Hand might be with him, that he might be kept by the power of God from the evil. And that is what we want. We want to be pulled upwards—to be kept from the love, the power, and the activities of sin, and from giving way to temptation and despair. "That Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve *me!*" We often think about sin grieving God; but are we equally grieved with sin when we see it? "That it may not grieve *me!*" We want to be as sensitive to sin as the sensitive plant is to the touch, so that its leaves instantly close. Just as a ship's compass is put out of gear when it passes near a mineral coast, because the ore on the coast has an instantaneous effect on the compass, so we want to be equally sensitive to sin, that it may not grieve us.

VI. JABEZ MADE A DEFINITE PRAYER: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!"—a definite prayer. What little things bring men into notoriety! They are associated with and remembered by some one thing ever afterwards. You never think of a locomotive without remembering Stephenson, or of the electric telegraph without remembering Cooke and Wheatstone. George Müller will ever be known as the man of the nineteenth century strong in believing prayer. And Jabez is always remembered and spoken of as "the man of prayer": if he had not prayed thus, he might have been dismissed like hundreds of other names in the Chronicles.

We are told that "God granted him [Jabez] that which he requested." Solomon prayed, "Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart." And what was God's answer? "Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart." The answer was just as definite as the prayer. "Make thy petition deep"; God loves to be plundered by His children.

Now, brethren, what is *our* life? If sickness, or poverty, or bereavement, or trial come upon us, do we say, "Ah! it is Jabez, it is sorrow"? We little think how the sun, which rises in the morning in a cloud, often sets in the evening in crimson and gold. Do not expect that God's Right Honourable members are raised in the lap of luxury, or are brought up in a glass case, or reared in a shaded rosary; they are the thrice-chosen

ones, "weak," "base," "despised," "those who have come out of great tribulation." If ye be sorrowful, think that it is often the ship which is the longest coming home which is the heaviest laden, and it is that which detains her upon her passage; one expects the best freight from that ship when she begins to unload her cargo.

Let us go in for this grand peerage of Heaven. Let us rise above our circumstances. Are we shrivelled, contracted, cramped, and impoverished? Do we live day after day an unblest life, a life devoid of power? Do not lay the blame on God, because He says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not." We are not straitened in Him; we are straitened in ourselves. Then let us go in for this mighty blessing, rising above our circumstances, whatever they may be. Call them, if you like, "Jabez," but rise above them, and claim the blessing; have enlarged expectations; have a definite prayer; lay it upon God's mercy-seat; then wait in expectant faith. So rise from sorrow to honour; claim your seat in the spiritual house, "seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," with all those who have lived and died in faith, and be Right Honourable members in the realm of Christian experience.

Jabez

BY REV. A. G. MERCER, D.D.

"Jabez was more honourable than his brethren," etc.—1 Chronicles iv. 9, 10.

The genealogy in which this text is found runs through nine chapters. Such lists contrast with any other known genealogy in simplicity, comprehensiveness, and moral effect. As in counting stars we gradually gain impressions of the extent of numbers, so here! But these names represent generations. So, in recounting them, it is as in looking above on a calm night: our own littleness, fugitiveness, is felt; and with the feeling comes the hush of care and pride; for in this sweep and rush of generations there is nothing for us but calm, adoring rest in that bosom which shall keep us from nothingness!

Now amid this long, dry roll of the dead, the story of Jabez appears as a green and peaceful islet in the waste,—living with human interests. It is a little story here; but in life it was a long and great story. The history of all this wilderness of men had shrunk down to their bare names; but this account of Jabez asserts its eminence in the record. The fragrance of the memory of the just floated down through all those ages, and still to-day is fragrant to us.

"Fame is a river," says Bacon, "on which all light and worthless objects float down, while the heavier sink to the bottom." This is not true, but there is much truth in it. The fact rather is that when the life of any one becomes singularly marked for good or evil, *that lives!* But seeing the chances of utter forgetfulness to which merit of any sort, and however high, is exposed, it is a striking delusion of noble and generous hearts when they would seek remembrance and honour anywhere but in the memory of God, and in the works of mercy and justice. Yet, though the holy and the lofty may be forgotten, it is not less one of the duties of men to keep alive the record of all noble people, to the adorning of history, and to the instructing and enlightening of men. Much spiritual power is lost out of the world when we allow good examples to perish, "no man regarding them."

Now this story of Jabez was at one time an eminent one, known widely. But, however numerous were the details which are omitted and lost, the *weight* of the life is preserved, even in this most condensed form. And that cannot be said of many lives. Try this condensation upon your own life: leave out all particulars, and tell your own career in one sentence; and do you think the thing stated will be dignified and weighty? That you lived,—that you were moved by the usual passions and aims of the race,—and that you died,—if that be the short narrative of your life, as it would be of most, you can see that, however pleasant or splendid may have been all its events and adornings,—you can see how poor a thing it is when stripped to its bare anatomy. This is the touchstone which exposes and disgraces the superb characters of time, and makes the darlings of the world abjects to God.

But this old Hebrew Jabez stands well this test, as we are now to see. The narration

is beautifully inartificial. It begins at the end: it begins with the character and position that this man had attained,—“Jabez was more honourable than his brethren,”—and then goes back even to his birth to account for this. “And his mother called his name Jabez, because,” said she, “I bare him with sorrow.” This is a sad beginning. But the next thing is that “Jabez called on the God of Israel.” That looks better. This child of sorrow was a caller upon God,—the God Who is the Father of His afflicted ones,—Who commands the day-spring upon the night,—Who blesses those who weep now and says that they shall laugh. And Jabez called on the God of Israel,—not, observe, upon the Deity, as some would prefer to say,—the vague, general God,—but upon a God ascertained, covenanted, and peculiar. Any prayer is good and of good issue; but the prayer to Him Who has made Himself certainly known to our fathers as the One Who hears and redresses,—as calling upon Him Who is *doubtless* our Father,—that is the prayer that “availeth much”; and that was the prayer of Jabez. “And Jabez called upon the God of Israel.” Now hear the prayer,—a prayer thought so good in itself, and one so memorable in its results, that it has survived through all these centuries: “Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me!”

We will suppose that this was in part a prayer for temporal good, as I dare say it was; yet the whole spirit of it is beautifully devout: it is full of belief in the power of God,—keenly alive and real, as a petition to a living heart which heard. And though in part perhaps it was the natural cry of a being named “the sorrowful,” and whose lot was sorrow, for relief and comfort in his days, yet it was blended with the most touching wishes for the better good,—“and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.”

In this part of the prayer you can discover the spirit of the whole. For he does not ask to be kept from evil because of its consequences, but because it wounded him to do that bitter thing, and to sin against God. “It sounds like a sigh of injured sensibility,—“and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.” It hurts me to the heart to sin against Thee,—let me not sin against Thee! Such was the prayer. “And God granted him that which he requested,” (for prayers of this tone are never refused,)—God gave to him according to his heart, and fulfilled all his counsel. Thence it came, in the words with which the little narrative commences, that “Jabez was more honourable than his brethren.”

There are some things here obviously worthy of note. A life begun under very sad auspices was strangely changed and brightened! There was something specially dark at the birth of this child, or this mother would not deliberately have fastened on him the name of “Sorrow.” It was a time perhaps of particular disaster to herself,—of peculiar suffering or poverty,—or the death or estrangement of the one whom nature gives the woman for support under her great trial,—or perhaps there was defect, and so disappointment, in the child itself;—some of these things wrung the heart of the Hebrew mother, or she would not have named her babe Jabez, the child of sorrow. But the boy growing up under this shade was not imbittered by it, but he turned, as I suppose instinctively, to God, and breathed in all his feelings every day the spirit of his prayer.

For you must not suppose this prayer to be any one distinct petition of Jabez. It is intended to express that such was the tone and style of the heart of the man,—that he habitually looked upward in that way,—that the words here set down were a sort of picturesque summary of his character. Sorrow intoned him, I suppose, to this fine spirit,—and then God was ready to bless him. He humbled himself, in the days of his darkness, under the mighty hand of God, and so God exalted him in due season, and made him more honourable than his brethren. Under the government of God we have no explanation of evil, but that it is an intended discipline of good. And here, is a case where the instrument fully accomplished the thing whereto God sent it. A rare case, alas!—rare, at least, in the fulness of the good made to issue out of the ill. Sorrow, when it does not work evil, often accomplishes some good; but tell me, you who have suffered, whether you do not feel that the most it should have done it has not done. How large a possibility did it open before you!—how wide and fair a land of purity and peace!—but you have entered and possessed it only on its borders. Change all this. Make full proof of the merits of affliction. Is any man afflicted or disappointed? “let him pray,”—let his life be prayer. I mean a fine spirit of trust Godward. Let your

heart daily be such that if you could coin it into language it would be just this: "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!"

Observe, further, how fine a memento to the honourable and prospered man was his name, "the sorrowful." It is a wholesome thing that in our pride we should remember our humble days and be modest,—that in ease we should remember pain, and in happiness sorrow, that we may be grateful, and that, as the discipline of affliction has raised us, prosperity may not befool us and cast us down. To carry with us, as if stamped upon us, the name and recollection of sorrow, will insinuate a tenderness through the hardening heart, infuse humbleness into its exaltation; and thus twice will affliction save us,—first directly, and then through its recollection.

It must have been a curious thing to the mother of this man, if she lived until the time of his prosperity, to think of that name, and to recall the feelings with which she had given it. If it were done in gloomy distrust of God, how fine the reproach, as if God said to her, "See now! See now!" And she might answer: "Ah! if I could have trusted Thee but a little!—but till the morrow! Now how dim and dream-like all these past sorrows are!—much like the momentary passing of clouds when the sun reappears." So it is with us all when the day of God's love becomes clear. We are astonished at ourselves, and we have good reason to be. We are little beings, and have no faith in our hearts. If the Divine hand is withdrawn for a moment from ours, we have not within us the love, the honour, to trust the Divine love and honour, but become overwhelmed, if not hateful and sullen! And if, like this woman, we had through our lives named all these times of our distrust and despondency with some gloomy name, and if these could stand around us, as Jabez stood before his mother, as living monuments of our narrowness and infatuation, yet to-morrow we should be narrow and infatuated still, and say: "The Lord hath surely shut up His compassions,—the Lord hath forgotten to be gracious."

Oh that we could settle it in our hearts that there is one true and permanent thing,—the mercy of God,—the pity and love of our forgiving Saviour,—and that all griefs are fugitive and the shapes of a dream,—that there is one blue, everlasting firmament above and around us, filled with the pure peace and splendour of God, and that dark days and mists and storms with lightning may fill our lower air for a moment, but that heaven with all its stars, is steady above us still! Then lift we up our heads, and not go sinning and sorrowing all our days, but, being joyful and grateful and sure of the Lord our Saviour, refuse to distrust, to sin, or dishonour Him in any way. So, though I am called Jabez to-day,—the one full of grief,—to-morrow I am sure I shall be "more honourable than all my brethren."

Jabez

BY REV. A. K. H. ROYD, D.D

"Jabez was more honourable than his brethren," etc.—1 Chronicles iv. 9, 10.

There was a Hebrew mother, to whom a child was born in a season of special sadness and sorrow. We do not know what was the cause of the special sorrow which was in that poor mother's heart when her child was sent to her: though we may perhaps suppose, from what we are told as to the mother being the only one to decide what should be her boy's name, that her husband was dead; and so the little one, half-orphaned from his birth, could never be met by a father's welcome, nor tended by a father's care. The sorrow of that Hebrew mother is all over now; and indeed we have reason to think that it was turned into gladness, if she was spared in this world, before many years passed on. But at the time, it had quite crushed her down: it had so overwhelmed her, that she seemed for the time to have lost even the power of hoping for better days. It seems as if she had thought that no good nor happiness could ever come of that little child that was as the memorial of so sad a season: and so she gave him a name that told of her present grief and her fears for the future. His mother called him Jabez: that is, Sorrowful. And he went through life bearing that name; and his

memory has come down to us through all these centuries, linked with that name; Jabez, Sorrowful.

It is not much we know of Jabez : we have his entire biography in these two verses which you have read. We are only told that Jabez, Sorrowful, grew up to be a man; and rose to honour—to special and supereminent honour. And we have preserved a prayer which Jabez offered, and which God granted him, which shews us that Jabez was as good, and wise, and energetic, and devout, as he was honoured and renowned. *That* prayer we shall think of hereafter : it might be a pattern for ours; and every petition in it may serve to remind us of great religious truths, which we ought never to forget. But meanwhile, let us fix on this : the pre-eminent honour to which *he* rose, who came into this world at so gloomy a season, and who bore a name expressive of so gloomy foreboding for the days to come. “Jabez,” we are told, “was more honourable than his brethren.” You have nothing told you of the other members of that family, who perhaps came in happier days, and who perhaps received more hopeful names. We may well believe, from the way in which the story is told, that they were good and worthy too : but still, in fame, in holiness, in wisdom, in goodness, it was Jabez who was always first. And how strange a contrast it must have been, between the sorrowful name, and the honoured and happy man who bore it : how strange a comment that life of honour and usefulness must have seemed, upon the mother’s faithless forebodings, and her needless fears ! Yes, it must have been curious to hear that name that sounded so sadly, mentioned by all men with such pleasant looks, and linked with so many deeds of kindness, and wisdom, and true heroism. For God, we are told, granted him the things he asked in that most comprehensive prayer ; and oh, how good, and wise, and brave a man *he* must have been, to whom *that* prayer and all it asked was granted ! And we say it must have sounded strange to hear it asked, Who was it that did that kind and noble deed ? and to hear it answered, Oh, it was Jabez ! Who was it that went out so valiantly against the enemies of his God, and “enlarged his coast,” his portion of the promised land, by those rich fields and woods ? Oh, it was Jabez ! Who was it that comforted that despairing heart,—who cheered that house of sorrow,—who guided that poor wanderer back ? Still, it was he whose name promised such different things : still, it was Jabez ! Yes, it was Sorrowful who carried joy to many a desolate home : it was Sorrowful who made the dim eye grow bright again with hope : it was Sorrowful whose name was on the lips of multitudes of men, as their very ideal of all that was pure, and good, and true, and happy. He rose above his fellow-men. He was “more honourable than his brethren” : and the words seem to imply that they, too, were honourable,—were good men, and happy men ; but oh ! there was none like Jabez ! None like Sorrowful to gladden his mother’s heart : none like Sorrowful for worldly success, and for spiritual wealth, wisdom, and happiness !

Let us fix on this point in the history of Jabez to think of first : and tell me, is the lesson of this far to seek ? You see, it was to her best and worthiest son that the mother of Jabez gave the name, that implied how little hope of future happiness with him or through him remained in her weary, despairing heart. We can think of a contrasted picture : you remember the proud and hopeful name which the mother of our race gave to her first-born son : you know how much of confident hope was embodied in the name of Cain. *Possession*, she called him,—a great thing gained from God,—who was yet so sorely to wring her heart. For even thus vain are human anticipations, whether of good or ill : the first murderer welcomed with the hopeful name of Cain ; while this wise, and good, and happy man was to bear the desponding name of Jabez. But without dwelling upon the vanity of all human calculation,—of all human hopes and fears,—let us now remember how often we all call by hard names, dispensations of God’s providence, which in reality are to prove great blessings. Probably in many cases those events in our history, those dealings of God with us, which we should call sorrowful at the time, stand us in more real stead, and do us more real good, than the brightest and happiest that ever come in our way. Even here, and now, we can understand, that *that* earthly trial or loss is not rightly called Jabez, Sorrowful, which works our spiritual good ; which leads us with simpler and humbler faith to that blessed Saviour Who is our only satisfying portion ; and which weans our heart somewhat from those things of time and sense to which it so naturally cleaves. And do you not all know, how sometimes we can afterwards see, that even looking no further than this world, it was good for us that we were afflicted ;—good for us that we were disappointed, that we were tried, that we were bereaved ?

And now, as we go on to consider the prayer which Jabez offered, and which God granted him; let us take along with us, to the consideration of the petition that stands first in it, the remembrance of these things which have been said, as to our little power to discern what is a blessing and what is not: as to the tendency in human beings to call *that* Cain which ought to be called Jabez; and *that* Jabez which ought to be called Cain. You see the all-comprehending petition with which the prayer of Jabez sets out. He "called upon the God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!" Yes, Bless me *INDEED*! It was because Jabez knew that he could never certainly tell what was truly blessing, and what seemed blessing and was not; that he devolved upon God Himself the charge and the responsibility of deciding what things were to come to him. What a wise, and what a safe prayer! That Thou wouldst bless me indeed. Send me *that* which Thou knowest is blessing, however ready I, in my ignorance, may be to think so! *That* is the spirit of the prayer. It was for the All-wise Himself to decide what was the exact discipline which Jabez needed at the time: it might be a painful discipline, it might be a happy one: but whatever it might be, Jabez knew that the thing he needed was the true blessing: and all he asked from God was, that, pleasant or painful, God would send him *that*! Yes, my friend: put that prayer together with what we are taught by the entire history of Jabez: and see what a lesson it teaches us as to how we ought to pray. When we are praying for temporal blessings, we ought never to pray for them absolutely: we ought always to pray for them if they be truly good for us: if not, God in answering our prayer would not be blessing us *indeed*. And even as regards spiritual blessings, though we may pray for them with more confidence and less reservation;—though we are quite sure that it must be truly good for us to have our sins pardoned through Christ, and our souls sanctified by the Holy Spirit; and though thus we are sure that God in giving us pardon and holiness would be blessing us *indeed*;—still, even as regards spiritual blessings, we do not know what is the exact dealing that may be most expedient for us at the time: we cannot be sure that in asking spiritual peace, joy, hope, or strength, we are asking the thing which would suit our present need the best. Perhaps humiliation may be the thing we need just then: perhaps the best thing for us would be to have our over-confidence rebuked,—to be brought back to a deeper sense of our own weakness, and a simpler leaning upon our kind Redeemer's strength and grace. You know, generally, the direction in which to steer; but you cannot say what little movement of the helm may be expedient from time to time, to suit each passing flaw of wind, or each crossing wave. And it is just because we do not know these things, that it is so wise to leave the decision of the precise thing to be sent us, as Jabez did, to God: and to pray, with him, that God would bless us *indeed*. Let Him deny us *that* which is not blessing indeed, however like blessing it may seem: and let Him send us *that* which is blessing indeed, though we might write against it, Jabez! Ah, my brother, you dare not pray, without a reservation if God sees it fit, that you may gain the worldly end on which you have set your heart: you dare not pray absolutely that you may live a long or a peaceful life: you dare not pray, without a condition, by the dying bed of your dearest, that they may be spared to you longer: you must always add, God's will be done, if God sees it good for you and them: but you can never go wrong if you do like Jabez: if you go humbly and hopefully in Christ's blessed name; and call on the God and Father of our Blessed Saviour, saying, Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed!

But let us go on with the wise and good man's prayer. The next two petitions in it let us take together. "Oh that Thou wouldst enlarge my coast; and that Thine hand might be with me!" These two requests must stand together, as we shall see. No doubt the first of the two refers to *this*: that Jabez was an Israelite who had yet to conquer from his enemies some portion of the inheritance allotted to him in the land of promise. There were fair tracts round him, appointed to him by God; and he wished to win these from God's enemies: and accordingly he prays that God would give them to him: he prays, "That Thou wouldst enlarge my coast!" And it was right, of course, to pray for this: but it was not enough merely to pray. It would not do, that Jabez should slothfully sit down, content to have merely asked God to give the inheritance he wished. You see from his prayer that he is going out to do what in him lies to accomplish the thing for which he prays. You see he asks that God's "hand might be with him," as he goes forth to do battle with the idolatrous race which meanwhile possesses the soil which is by right his own. In short, the wise man, in the exercise

of a manly common sense, asks God to help him, because he is going to try to help himself.

There is a great and sound principle implied here: a great lesson for all of us. It is the duty of combining effort with prayer. When we are desirous to compass any new attainment;—when we wish to enlarge our coast, as it were, by taking in greater fields of faith, of holiness, of patience, of humility, of all Christian grace,—in regard to all of which we may well take up Joshua's words, that "there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed,"—let us do like Jabez. It is not enough that we pray to God to give us more grace: we must labour to get more grace. We must diligently use the means that foster the growth of grace in us. We must cultivate Christian grace as we cultivate bodily strength and skill,—by exercise: all the while remembering that without God's help and Spirit we can do nothing: working, in short, like Jabez, as if we could do all, and praying as if we could do nothing.

We may safely say, that if Jabez had merely prayed that God would enlarge his coast, and then remained idle at home, making no exertion for himself, his portion would not have been enlarged. God would have regarded such a prayer as a mere mockery. And on the other hand, if Jabez had gone forth against his enemies in his own unaided strength, he would likely enough have failed too. The wisdom of Jabez appeared in *this*: that he put prayer and effort together. You know how a wiser and greater than Jabez had done the like: how our Saviour bade us at once "Watch and pray." Watchfulness and prayer must go together, alike in things temporal and things spiritual. And it is foolish to raise a question which is the more essential, when both are essential. It would be abundantly absurd to get up a furious controversy whether food or drink were the more necessary to the life of man. Both are necessary. And Jabez, wise and good man, knew it. And so, while he prayed that God "would enlarge his coast," he buckled on his harness and went down to the battle. Do you the like, my friend. Pray earnestly for more grace: and work heartily to get it.

And so we come to the last petition in this prayer: a petition comprehensive and wise as the first. The first petition, you remember, was for true blessing. The last is for deliverance from true evil,—and from the evil effects and influences of all evil. Here are the words: "And that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." You know that this is a world of evil, bodily and spiritual: a world of suffering and wrong: and through these, among other means, God works His ends on our souls. It is not God's purpose that we should never see or come in contact with evil at all. And you see the moderation, the acquiescence in God's appointments, the sound sense, which characterise Jabez's prayer. "And that Thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me." He does not ask, you see, that evil may never come; but that evil may not be suffered to really harm when it comes. And so his prayer is in perfect harmony with that which was dictated to us by Christ: "Deliver us from evil": for Christ's words do not lead us to hope that evil will never come; but that by God's grace when it *does* come, we shall be saved from its evil tendencies and results. We may pray that evil may never be suffered to harden us; to stir us up to wrath against God; to make us fretful, rebellious, impatient; to tempt us to sin; in short, to do us harm when God intends it always to do us good. It was for *this* that Jabez prayed.

Oh, my brother, we know that evil will come to us; it has come already, and it will come again. There is not a heart—not even the youngest—that has not had its share of grief: and *that* which has been is *that* which shall be. But if evil be sanctified to us: if it be met in a right and humble spirit: then, though it may come, it will not grieve: it will not offend us,—it will not prove a stumbling-block in our Heavenward way. Nay: it will further us with a continual help! It will prove a blessing,—a blessing *indeed*. It will wean us from earth: it will purge away our dross: it will quicken our steps towards that peaceful home, where dwell such multitudes who "came out of great tribulation!" Let us then pray like Jabez. Let us prefer, not the unreasonable and extravagant request, that evil may never come; but the modest and Christian request, that when evil comes, as it surely will come, still that it may never grieve!

Such was the prayer of that good man whose history so belied his name; and who, doubtless for our comfort and warning among other ends, lived and died, so long ago, and so far away. And see what came of Jabez. No wonder he was so honourable! You have seen what the things were for which he asked: and God's word tells us, closing the history of Jabez, "And God granted him that which he requested." God gave him

all he asked! Oh, what a biography for any man! See what is taught us in the assurance that God granted Jabez his prayer. It tells us that through life, God blessed him indeed: that God enlarged his coast: that God's hand was with him: and that God kept him from evil, so that it did not grieve him. It does not at all follow, from what we are told of that good man's honoured life, that it was one of unmingled brightness; or that it was beyond what we may humbly ask through Christ, and humbly hope. God "blessed him indeed"; but *that* which is a blessing indeed, may not be what the worldly man would think a blessing at all. We cannot be sure, even of the man whom God blessed *indeed*, that his life was all sunshine. Likely enough, he had his share of the worries of life. Likely enough, he had now and then a great trial. Likely enough, there were days when the heart of Sorrowful was sorrowful enough; and when Jabez mourned beside the tomb where those he loved were sleeping. But still, he went on through life in such fashion that he drew good from all things that befell him: and so, through all, God kept His promise, and "blessed him indeed,"—for all that came was truly blessing. And then, though his "coast was enlarged," perhaps the portion he got, after all, seemed large only to his moderate desires and ideas: perhaps it was no such very great tract of territory after all: and likely enough, his neighbours would smile at Jabez for being so well pleased with it; and I daresay the ill-set people among them would try to put him out of conceit with it,—just as ill-set people do the same thing now. And then, when evil befell Jabez, all men could see the outward affliction, but none could see what was the inward result; all men could see that evil came, but only Jabez knew that it fell where it could not grieve. And so, to the eyes of ordinary on-lookers, the outward lot of Jabez may not have seemed so much happier than the lot of other men. Perhaps his path in life may, to outward view, have appeared like the average one of ordinary believers. His lot was not beyond our reach; nor beyond the possibilities of what may come to ourselves. Perhaps there are people in every Christian congregation, who are very like what Jabez was. People who are more deserving of honour than most of their brethren of mankind, though they may not get it. People whom God blesses indeed, though they have their many cares. People whose coast is enlarged, though it be in fields of faith and holiness and peace, which are not visible to the passer-by. People to whom their share of evil comes, but is made by God's Spirit to conduce to their eternal welfare. And *we* may fitly ask for all *that*; and hope for all *that*: through our Redeemer, and for His sake.

Isaiah

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory," etc.—St. John xii. 41.

St. John here tells us that when the Prophet speaks of seeing the Lord sitting on His Throne (Isaiah vi.), it is of Christ and the glory of His Kingdom that he speaks. But the words may be taken as expressing the whole character of the prophecies of Isaiah; "he saw His glory," the glory of Christ, "and spake of Him." Beyond all the Prophets he beheld and spake of Christ. And not that only, but the expression *he saw* is peculiarly spoken of Isaiah; his prophecy is called "the vision." "Esay the Prophet," says the son of Sirach, "who was great and faithful in his vision." Thus the first words or title of his book is, "The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw." And again, in the beginning of the second chapter, "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw." A remarkable expression, "the word which he saw," like that of St. John, "That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, the Word of Life." But the word "vision" especially belongs to Isaiah, as he seems to behold with the eyes in a vivid and strong manner, and not only to hear of the things which he speaks. As Job says when purified by his trials, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee."

But what is it of which the Evangelist says that Isaiah spoke when he thus beheld Christ? It is of the rejection of the Jews. "He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart: that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart."

This then is the burden of Isaiah. And this vision recorded in the sixth chapter may very well serve to set forth the character, and indeed briefly contains the sum of all his prophecies.

"In the year," he says, "that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a Throne, high and lifted up." As the temporal Israel began to decline and wane away, just before the death of that leprous king who invaded the Priest's office, he beholds the Throne of Christ in the Temple, and the "ministering spirits" giving thanks to the Ever-blessed Trinity, in Whose Name Christians are baptised; and sees the Kingdom of Christ filling the world. "Above it stood the Seraphims" . . . "and one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." And then at the sound the door posts of that visible temple were moved, as ready to depart; and the Prophet in humiliation laments his uncleanness, as all the saints do in the manifestation of Christ. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Here the effect of this spiritual lumination within which God bestows is as it was with Job, who when he says, "but now mine eye seeth Thee," adds "wherefore I abhor myself." So it is with the Prophet, "Woe is me! for I am undone."

Such is the spirit which pervades Isaiah's prophecies throughout. And not less expressive is that which follows. "Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal, in his hand, from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips." "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." This alacrity with which he complies, "not disobedient unto the heavenly vision," marks the cheerful love and brave confidence of Isaiah. The very words of his acceptance express the ready obedience of an Apostle, not obedience only, but a willing offer of service. And the Seraphim touching his lips, admitting him as it were into their company about the Throne, burning with Seraphic knowledge; and the live coal from the altar; how it all expresses the character of his prophecies; conveying by his words a holy flame into the cold hearts of men, to inspire them with love and Divine knowledge, purifying their hearts as by fire, and this too from the altar; for all is of the sacrifice of Christ, of His atonement and Godhead. Yet wonderful to say, this his Evangelic or Angelic commission is to seal up the eyes and ears of the Jews, for it is added, "And He said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not."

The Spirit of God Who marks His manifestations by sensible signs; by the dove at our Lord's Baptism; by the fiery and cloven tongues at Pentecost; He speaks through Isaiah with the altar coal of the Seraphim. And as music partakes of the character of the instrument on which it is played, so the temper of the Prophet was no doubt suited to the Heavenly hand and the finger of God. The very mode in which their mission was conveyed characterised the Prophets. Ezekiel was given to eat of the roll; the mouth of Jeremiah was touched by the hand of the Lord giving him power of speech; but Isaiah was thus set apart by a yet more solemn and sublime consecration, by the vision of Christ in His Church. Yet further, by Moses in the burning bush was Christ seen as the Everlasting God; by the children of Israel as the Judge in the terrors of Mount Sinai; by St. Stephen standing on the right hand of God to aid; by St. Paul in brightness beyond the sun to convince; by St. John in the Apocalypse as the High Priest that liveth for ever; but by Isaiah as sitting on the Throne of His Kingdom, and the whole earth full of His glory; and then receiving from the hands of the Seraphim his commission with a loving faith, not as a Prophet only, but one might say as an Evangelist and Apostle. It is remarkable, that his very name should signify "the salvation of the Lord!"

And thus we find that when the Gospel was first preached the testimony of Isaiah is referred to as if he had been already the teacher of it all; he bears witness, and witness is borne to him; so that he is more quoted in the New Testament than all the other Prophets put together. As soon as John the Baptist begins to preach he refers to the Prophet Isaiah as calling him the "voice crying in the wilderness." When the Bible was given to our Lord Himself to read in His first preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, it was the Prophet Isaiah from which He read, when He said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." And when He went from thence to Capernaum, it was, the Prophet Isaiah, says the Evangelist, that described His going as the light springing up in the dark land. When the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire

if He were the Christ, our Lord called attention to those particular works which Isaiah had described in the Messiah. And He Himself when there rejected said, "Well did Esaias prophesy of you." When the Spirit sent Philip to convert the Ethiopian eunuch it was in the Prophet Isaiah that he was reading of Christ. When St. Paul first taught at Rome it was the testimony of Isaiah which he pointed out to his countrymen; it was to the same Prophet Isaiah he had so often appealed before in his Epistle to the Romans. And thus it has continued afterwards in the Church. St. Augustine mentions in his Confessions, that when he asked St. Ambrose what book he should read on his conversion, he was told by him the Prophet Isaiah. St. Jerome speaks of wishing to expound him as rather an Apostle and Evangelist than a Prophet; as being himself one of those of whom he himself says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those that preach the Gospel of peace!"

So thoroughly is the Gospel interwoven with Isaiah's prophecies. All the history of our Lord's coming in the flesh is there to be found; the forerunner preparing the way before Him; His birth of a virgin as our Immanuel; His flight into Egypt; His gentle mode of teaching, with no strife, nor crying, nor voice heard in the streets; His healing miracles, as opening the eyes of the blind, and ears of the deaf; all the particulars of His suffering and passion as by an eye-witness; as the Man of Sorrows, set at nought, wounded, smitten with stripes, and stricken, yet silent as a lamb brought to the slaughter; His death and burial; His Resurrection, and His sending of the Comforter; the call of the Gentiles; and His coming again to judgment; and in conclusion of all the final state of the good, and of the wicked, with which his prophecies terminate, of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched. All these he describes expressly; but more than all is his prophecy pervaded and luminated with the Gospel; the vision, the rapt vision into the things of God is so peculiarly his. He is full of warnings and of judgments; and in his near admission unto the Throne of God clouds and darkness are round him; but every cloud is full of light, every judgment is lined or penetrated with the Gospel, its comforts and its glory.

His vision—the range of his spiritual sight—is so extensive, that he mourns not as circumscribed by passing troubles and the rejection of the Jews, but exults and breaks forth into a strain of thankfulness at the call of the Gentiles. "Lift up thine eyes round about and behold; all these gather themselves together and come to thee." "Thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, as a bride doeth." Surely if the Seraphim about the Throne sing in anticipation of the Gospel it must be in strains such as these of Isaiah. As this Prophet says of the Jews, He hath blinded their eyes, that they should not see; so of himself it might be said, He hath opened his eyes and given him to behold His glory. They, when in the midst of it, saw it not: he, though afar off, beheld Him as nigh. They looked upon Him with their bodily eyes, but they beheld Him not: he saw Him in the Spirit so vividly that he spake of His Crucifixion and the scenes of His life as if he had been present. It is as it were vision and not prophecy.

Again; the very words and images with which he describes the Gospel are such that even we, with our knowledge, could find no more glowing or suitable terms with which to speak of it. It is "a tabernacle shadowing from the heat, a place of refuge, a covert from the storm"; "peace flowing like the river"; "light springing up in the land of the shadow of death"; "sins as scarlet made white as snow"; "salvation appointed for walls and bulwarks"; the wild beasts led by the little child; "the glorious Lord unto us a place of rivers and streams." Nothing could be more descriptive of the Prophet himself, in these his Divine gifts, than are his own words, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off."

Such, then, is the first and greatest of Prophets whose writings come down to us; but there is no one whose prophecies are less marked by his own peculiar disposition and character, or which connect themselves so little with the circumstances of his own history. Ezekiel speaks of himself, and Jeremiah much of his own sorrows; but Isaiah does not so. He comes before us indeed in the Book of Kings, but it is only to deliver messages of the same sublime and exalted character as his written prophecies; to Hezekiah on his sickness, and on his recovery, of God's judgments, and the answer of God to the threats of Sennacherib. His miracles, too, are of the same kind, great and wonderful, such as the going back of the sun, and the Angel smiting the Assyrian host. "Ask thou a sign," he says in sublimest words to Ahaz, "in the heavens above, or in the depths below." He does not appear mixed up with the events of his time, on which

he bore to his people the Divine messages, but seems in spirit apart, as conversing with God. He does not, as David in the Psalms, speak of his own individual trials, in which Christ was the strength of his soul; nor as Jeremiah, suffering with the sins and sufferings of the Jews; but ever sees beyond the glories of Christ's Kingdom,—and the vast, awful, eternal year. His very first words are, "Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O Earth," as if about to speak of things which Angels as well as men desire to look into.

In like manner of his own history itself nothing is said. It is often spoken of by early writers "as most certain tradition," of which there was doubt in the Church, that he died a martyr, being "sawn asunder" by Manasses; of whose father, Hezekiah, he had been the friend and counsellor; but these and like trials leading to his martyrdom, are not mentioned in Scripture; it is also supposed that he was, like Daniel, of a princely family, but there is no evidence of this, unless it be in the character of his style of writing. From the throne of kings he is brought near to the Throne of God, surpassing in sublimity all the Prophets. But in the shadow of that Throne he is hidden. Like the Priestly Prince Melchizedeck, his earthly belongings are not known, for his life is with Christ in God. In the prophecies which he has to deliver, heavy judgments are conveyed; but they are always the occasion of his looking forward from them to the everlasting mercies which are with God; whatever calamities he had to endure, they are not mentioned by him, for his eyes were looking afar off; and "men have not perceived by the ear," he says, "neither hath the eye seen what God hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him." And as the one great subject interwoven with, lying under, in and beyond all his sayings, is the first and the second coming of Christ, so far as we can learn any thing of his own spirit and temper of mind, it is that especially in which we are to wait for the comings of God. To take and understand his prophecies aright we are to be like him, lifting our hearts above earthly things, heeding them not, seeing them not, on account of the great and glowing flood of light that is poured down afar in the opening of the heavens. "All flesh," he cries, "is grass"; but it is in order to add, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain."

To conclude, we observed that ancient writers wished to explain Isaiah rather as an Evangelist than a Prophet, now this it is which the Church does for us, and in fact supplies us with the best commentary, by reading this Prophet so entirely, both on Sundays and week days, during this season of Advent. We must all know that passing events, times, and occasions, throw a light upon Scripture, in a marvellous and surprising manner, draw out its meaning, and forcibly apply it, more than any observations of our own could possibly do. And none of us can say how much the reading of Isaiah at this time of Advent has served to furnish us with the fuller understanding of this Evangelical Prophet. It thus also serves to carry on and hold up this great light to the last days of Antichrist, as doubtless it has been divinely intended; according to that description given of him in Ecclesiasticus, "He saw by an excellent spirit what should come to pass at the last, and he comforted them that mourned in Sion. He showed what should come to pass for ever and secret things or ever they came." The time, too, when this great Prophet came forward, is to be noticed; it was in the decline of the temporal Israel; all things prepared for their ruin; then it was that the visions of Isaiah were turned to the future; then was faith taught. Something of this kind seems likely to be hereafter.

Again, how was he instated in this high calling? it was by the coal from the altar on his lips: and what does this signify to us? in an assembly of Christians I need not say; it is the Body of Christ, sacrificed for us, full of His Godhead as with living fire. In approaching we say, "Lift up your hearts," and the answer is, "We lift them up unto the Lord."

The warnings of Isaiah are to us like sounds of the Archangel's trumpet, great, glorious, but very awful. "Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O Earth," is the sound; for, as the Psalmist says, "He shall call the Heavens from above and the earth, that He may judge His people"; and who are these His chosen? "Gather My saints," He says, "together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me with sacrifice."

Isaiah

BY REV. E. B. PUSEY, D.D.

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send," etc.—Isaiah vi. 8—10.

Such was the heavy burden laid upon Isaiah in his fresh youth. Like St. Paul—he had seen the glory of God; he had seen, as man could in the flesh see and live, God Himself; he had witnessed the burning love of those fiery spirits of love, the Seraphim; he had felt, in that awful Presence of the All-Holy, the sinfulness of man and his own. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." Perhaps God, as He often does in those whom He early calls, had awakened in him the longing to speak to his God-forgetting people in the Name of God. Perhaps, as God had awakened in Moses, while yet in Pharaoh's court, the consciousness that he was to be God's instrument in delivering His people, and had so filled his soul with the thought, that he wondered that they understood not the meaning of his slaying the Egyptian; so He had kindled in Isaiah the burning longing to be employed by God to His degenerate people. God discloses Himself to the hearts which He has prepared. And now at the sight of God, he felt how all-unfit he was to speak in the Name of the All-Holy God. "Woe is me! for I am undone." His longing must have lived, if he could but be fitted for the mission which he longed for. But the sight of God had pierced his soul with the conviction, how holy his words must be, because they are the words of the All-Holy; how holy ought to be the lips which would take those words upon them; how pure *he* should be, who would be the messenger of God the All-Holy to sinful man. The sentence, which guilty man of himself deserves from the Holy God, was already in his feeling, fulfilled on him, "I am cut off." Then followed that wondrous type, of the Incarnation first and then of the Holy Eucharist, the living heavenly Fire in a visible form, the Coal from the Altar; and that, which the incorporeal Seraph out of reverence touched not, was approached to his lips, the type of Him "by Whom the guilt of the world is purged." "This has touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is gone, thy sin is atoned for." And then God, the Holy Trinity,—Whose praises he had heard, sung by the Seraphim in their Trisagion, which the Church has caught up from them,—willing that he should have the reward of a spontaneous self-oblation, elicit in words the devotion which they had inspired, and ask, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" And Isaiah summed up his whole future life in those two words, "Behold me; send me." Then on his ardent soul was poured the heavy message, "Go, and thou shalt tell *this* people," (God speaks of them no more as His own,) "Hear ye on, and understand not; and see ye on, and know not. Make thou dull the heart of this people, and its ears make thou heavy, and its eyes close thou; lest it see with its eyes, and with its ears hearken, and its heart understand, and it return and one heal it." Startling office for one so sanguine and so young! heavy burden to bear for probably sixty-one years of life, to be closed by a martyr's excruciating death! Outside of that commission there was hope; hope, because the promises of God could not fail of fulfilment; hope, because in the worst times of Israel there had been those seven thousand which the Prophet knew not of, but of whom God revealed to him, who had stood faithful to God amid the national apostacy; hope, because when God pronounces not a doom, we may take refuge in the loving mercy of Him Who swears by Himself, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but," (the "but" says, "in *this* I have pleasure," on this Almighty God dwells with pleasure,) "in the turning of the wicked from his way, and that he live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die. O house of Israel."

The message was to the people, not to individuals: "Go ye to this people, and say." It related to individuals, only as they were such as the mass of the nation was, as they themselves made up that mass. But a burning zeal enters into the mind of God, Who "willeth that all men should be saved, and should come to the knowledge of the truth." A burning love entered into the mind of Him, in thought of Whom Isaiah found his solace, "Who died for all." Yet we know how St. Paul attests, "my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great grief and unintermitting sorrow in my

heart," so that he could wish even to be severed from the Presence of Christ, never to behold Him Who had died for him, in Whom was his life, Who was his life within him, if so be Israel might be saved. And now this, in all seeming, was the thankless office to which Isaiah was called, to be heard, to be listened to, by some with contempt, by others with seeming respect, and to leave things in the main worse than he found them. His office was towards those, in part at least, who were ever-hearing, never-doing, and so never understanding. The more they heard and saw, the further they were from understanding, from being converted, from healing reaching to them. Such they were, God says, a little later, in Ezekiel's time. You know how they came to the Prophet of God, but had set up every man his idol in his heart, (who was indeed his god,) and how God says, "Are ye come to enquire of Me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you." Nay, so coming, they should only be the more deceived. And of this Isaiah was to be the occasion and the instrument. Not by any direct hardening from God, not through any agency of the Prophet, but by man's free-will, hearing but not obeying, seeing but not doing, feeling but resisting, the preaching of the Prophet would leave them only more hopelessly far from conversion, that God might heal them.

And what said the Prophet? Contrary as the sentence must have been to all the yearnings of his soul, crushing to his hopes, he knew that it must be just, because "the Judge of the whole world" must "do right." He intercedes, but only by those three words, "Lord, how long?" He appeals to God. Such could not be God's ultimate purpose with His people; not for this could He have taken them out of all nations to be a peculiar people to Himself. The night was to come; sin deserved it; but was it to have no dawn? Hope there is yet, but meanwhile a still-deepening night, a climax of woe; and that in two stages. In the first, "cities left without inhabitants"; and not cities only, as a whole, but "houses too tenantless"; nor these alone, but "the whole land desolate, and God removes the inhabitants far away, and there shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." Nor this only, but when, in this sifting-time, nine parts should be gone, and one-tenth only remain, this should be again consumed: only, like those trees which survived the winters and storms of a thousand years, while the glory wherewith God once clad it was gone, its hewn stem was still to live; "a holy seed" was to be the stock thereof.

The vision, opened before him, stretches on until now and to the end. His question, "How long? Until when?" implied a hope that there would be an end; the answer "until," declared that there would be an end. We have, in one, that first carrying away, the small remnant which should return; its new desolation; the holy seed which should survive; the restoration at the end, of which St. Paul says, then "all Israel shall be saved."

And this message fell on one of the tenderest of hearts in its early freshness. As he is eminently the Gospel-prophet, the Evangelist in the old covenant, so he had already been taught by the Holy Ghost the Gospel-lesson, "Love your enemies." He denounces God's judgments; but, himself the type of Him Who wept over Jerusalem, "My heart," he says, "shall cry out from Moab," who was ever banded against his people. "I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon; my bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab, and my inward parts for Kir-haresh." Even Babylon, whom he foreknew as God's appointed waster of His people, the world-power who should uproot His people, and carry them far away, even Babylon moved him in its fall. Present in spirit at a doom which was to come nearly two centuries later, he was himself in spirit as one of the sufferers. "My loins," he says, "are filled with reeling cramp; writhing pangs have laid hold of me, as the pangs of a woman in travail. I am bowed down, that I cannot hear; I am terror-stricken, that I cannot see. My heart reelth; horror hath terrified me: the eventide of my desire hath He made into terror to me." If Isaiah so felt for the destroyer of his people, was so horror-stricken for the woes of those yet unborn, what for *their* sufferings who were flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, whose woes he had to tell them, face to face, and which would come upon them because they would not hear!

And in this his general grief for his people, there were so many particular griefs, as many as there were forms of evil. All confronted him. For his office lay in the heart of the material prosperity, the intellect, the corruptions, the rebellions, the oppressions of his people, the city of David, once "the faithful, now the harlot-city, where righteousness once dwelt, and now murderers." There, in Jotham's sixteen years, there was all the insolence of human pride, "high and lifted up"; in Ahaz's next sixteen years the whole weight of the king's authority was thrown in against the faith, from his first scarce-

veiled insolence in rejecting the Prophet's offer in the name of God to give him what sign he would of the verity of his promise in his trouble, to his naked apostacy, when he closed the Temple, suspended its worship, burned his sons in the dreadful worship of Moloch, made every corner of Jerusalem a shrine of idolatry, and desecrated every city by its own idol-chapel. Then came Hezekiah's reformation, in himself personally devout, but powerless over his people; the thickening troubles of his country, unconverted by each successive scourge. "The people turneth not to Him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Host." And so his burden still had to be, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His Hand is stretched out still." Under Manasseh, the tide of evil, which Hezekiah's personal influence had stayed, burst out uncontrolled; it swept along with it the boy-king of twelve years also, thereafter himself to give fresh impulse to the current, to flood Jerusalem with monstrosities of cruelty and lust, as worship of their gods, and, (too late for his land though not for his soul,) to turn to God. Martyrdom crowns those only who resist. In witnessing then for God, though in this reign he uttered no recorded prophecy, God, after his threescore years of service, ordered that he should close his life's long martyrdom with a martyr's death. Strange likeness to our Lord, of Whom he spake so much, if, in that reign of terror and of blood, occasion was found for slaying him through distortion of his words!

This great outline of suffering was filled up variedly. Ahaz's scornful rejection echoed on in the unbelieving taunts of the great or the learned. They ridiculed the simplicity of his teaching. It was but fit for babes; they were men, and had outgrown it! "line on line, rule on rule; a little here, a little there. Whom should he teach knowledge?" They challenged the Almighty to fulfil His Prophet's threats: "Let Him make speed, hasten His work, that we may see; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!"

Present judgments, they said, they would more than recover; against threatened judgments they had made their covenant with death, and their agreement with hell; if imminent, they looked to strengthen themselves with human help, not to their Maker; if inevitable, they would enjoy themselves to the end; it was, "Eat, drink, and to-morrow die." The leaders misled, the judges judged unjustly, the rich left no space for the poor, their women had lost modesty, their men were oppressors; evil they called good, good evil; chastisement but engendered increased rebellion; the whole head was sick and the whole heart faint.

Isaiah could but weep for those who wept not for themselves. "I will be bitter in my weeping," he says; "press not on me to comfort me for the desolation of the daughter of my people."

Yet where there is desolation for the sake of God, there is also consolation. Wherein was Isaiah's? Not in the solace of his married life. His daily dress was like John Baptist's, the hair-cloth pressing upon his loins, wearing to the naked flesh, although mentioned only when he was to put it off and himself to become a portent to his people, walking naked and barefoot. His two sons were, by their names, the continual pictures of that woe on his people; the one spoke only of "the speed of the prey, the haste of the spoil," the other was that sad dirge which so echoes through the Prophets, "a remnant shall return," a remnant only of that people who were to be as the sand of the sea, the stars of heaven. What, then, was his solace?

St. John tells us, in connection with that heavy message, "These things said Isaiah, when he saw His glory and spake of Him." Of whom? Of Christ, of Whom St. John was speaking. Isaiah had seen, as man can see, His Deity. He had, in his inmost being, in some way, unimaginable to us who have not beheld it, seen the Holy Trinity in Their Unity of Essence, and *that* in the Person of the Son Who said of Himself, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." For it was a Human Form which he beheld, sitting enthroned as the Judge, and receiving the worship of the glowing love of the Seraphim. He had seen Him in His glory and the glory of the Father, transfiguring the likeness of that Human Form, Which is now, with the Father, the light of Heaven; Which, amid the Uncreated Light which God Is, illumines Heaven also with an Uncreated Light, (as St. John says, "The Lamb is the Light thereof,") because "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

How should not this Vision live in him for those threescore years, who knew that thereafter, not through some created image, not by similitude, but face to Face he should behold the End of our being, God? So God prepared him to be,—above all others even of those God-inspired men, those men of zeal and longing and love, "the goodly

company of the Prophets"—the Evangelic Prophet, in that he had seen the glory of the Lord.

God's Word is consistent with itself. We need not marvel (as some have done) that he should speak so plainly as he does, that that Child to be born to us was to be "the Mighty God, the Everlasting Lord," or that the Virgin's Son should be called "Immanuel," when he had himself seen a Human Form in the ineffable Glory of God. No wonder that he should speak of Him Whom he had seen enthroned as Judge, smiting the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips slaying the wicked.

This, then, is ever his consolation; this his joy in trouble; this his life in death. The surges of this world, higher and higher as they rose, only bore his soul upward toward his God. He, too, was a man of longing. In the darkness of the world God ever brings this light before him; his darkest visions are the dawn-streaks of the brightest light. Does he describe darkness the image of that outer darkness? Then follows, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." Has he to denounce the utter desolation of all the pride and glory and luxury of the mighty and the beautiful? "Zion, clean-emptied, shall sit on the ground." God teaches him straightway to add, "In that day shall the Branch of the Lord be beauty and glory." And then follow the holiness and peace which He would bestow. Has he to say that the refuge of lies, under which the scornful hoped to hide themselves, shall be swept away? He first says, in the Name of God, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Corner-stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone: he that believeth shall not haste." Has he to denounce woe on all the houses of joy, in the joyous city? It is but "until the Spirit be poured out from on high," "And the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the fruit of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." Has he to speak of the house of David as the stump of a tree hewed to the ground? "From that hewn stump of Jesse," he says, "there shall come forth a rod, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots, and the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him"; and then follow the peaceful and peace-giving glories of His reign, and the restoration of the remnant of His people. Has he to tell, how in the captivity of Babylon "they that rule over them make them to howl, and Thy Name every day is blasphemed"? Forthwith he bursts into a jubilee of joy: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."

Never does that sad message part from his sight. He does not live in a bright, ideal future, in Messianic hopes, as men tell you of. His future is as his present, until "death shall be swallowed up in victory." It is still "the remnant shall return; the remnant," he repeats, "shall return to the Mighty God"; they are "the gleanings left in it; as the shaking of an olive-tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel"; "the shaking of an olive-tree, as the gleanings when the vintage is done." It is what we see before our eyes now, "Ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel." And when the Messiah came, it was to be so still. He was to be at once "a sanctuary, but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." The words of the aged Simeon but summed up the prophecies of Isaiah: "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." For such as they were, such did Christ become to them, for the fall of the proud and self-satisfied, for the rising again of those who owned themselves fallen. So Jesus Himself said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind."

And so his soul was prepared for that great paradox of prophecy which God revealed through him, the way of whose accomplishment, St. Peter says, was a mystery to them, whose meaning they searched into—the "sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow." He, as no other, spake of the buffeting, the spitting upon, the malefactor's death, the counting with the transgressors, the contempt, the constant companionship with grief. He, as few did, spake of the glorious reign, the everlasting rule; how He should reign in righteousness, and be a hiding-place from the storm to those who seek Him, the shadow of a great Rock in this weary and dry land of our banishment from Him. For these should the message for his people be revealed: "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken."

In this hope and longing he lived, in a future for himself, a future which God had promised to the remnant of His people. He was a man of longing: "In the way of Thy judgments have I awaited Thee, O Lord; to Thy Name and Thy memorial is the longing of my soul. With my soul have I longed for Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me I will seek Thee early"; "This is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will rejoice and be glad in His salvation"; "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed in Thee, for on Thee is it rested." For he looked on beyond this world of disappointment and of shadows. He longed to see Him Who had at the beginning revealed Himself to him, the King on His Throne. "Thine eyes," he says, "shall see the King in His beauty." The grave was to him but a chamber where he should hide himself for a little while; then, to behold what "ear hath not perceived nor eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him who waiteth for Him." For for Him had his whole life been one long waiting, and He Himself is the everlasting bliss of those who wait for Him.

Isaiah

BY REV. NEHEMIAH BOYNTON, D.D.

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send," etc.—Isaiah vi. 8—10.

"We should count time by heart throbs," rather than by the beat of the pendulum, or the computation of the calendar. Some moments are days, some days years, some years centuries! One hour shapes a destiny; it is that destiny; the subsequent is only the outworking of the inherent. One experience determines a character; it is that character; for future addition to, or subtraction from, the life is simply the initial experience confirming itself. Apparently a heartless and rigorous law, this divine provision is a benediction to faith, and to hope a perpetual assurance. It is at once an elixir and a sedative to believe "That in this moment there is life and food for future years."

Subtract from Jacob the ladder reaching from Heaven to earth and "crowded with Angels unnumbered"; from Moses, the burning bush; from David, the sling and five smooth stones; from Peter, James and John, the Mount of Transfiguration; from Paul, the Damascus road; from Augustine, the child's voice singing "Take and read"; from Shaftesbury, the picture in the art gallery; from Finney, the question in the forest, and then, if you can, account for these lives. It were "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." But these lives only accentuate and italicize common experience; they are printed in English, or great primer; ours in agate, pearl, diamond, possibly, brilliant. It is easier to read the English, but the brilliant carries the same truth! Let three circumstances in Isaiah's life confirm and emphasize the suggested truth.

I. THE SLUMBERING ISAIAH.

We are ignorant of the details of the life of the great Prophet, but we know that he was an educated man, versed in the literature and science of his day; that he was a statesman, and while yet a young man had come to be a chosen and valued counsellor at the royal court of Judah's king. Judah at this time was in a most embarrassing situation, for Egypt on the south and Assyria on the north, both powerful nations, were eager if not absolutely to absorb, at least to control, the little kingdom, which was a buffer between them. To pacify Sennacherib of Assyria without infuriating Tirhakah of Egypt; to appease Tirhakah without enraging Sennacherib, this was the problem of diplomacy for weak Judah, to which Isaiah addressed the splendid energies of his educated mind. Policy was his study; the king his ideal; the nation his care. Presumably he was adroit, discerning, skilful in his statecraft, but, like many another, he was awake only to the superficial; he was asleep to the real! Sennacherib and Tirhakah were kings indeed; now he could foil and now favour them; but the other, the greater King, "within the shadow, keeping watch above His own," Him Isaiah saw not; Isaiah was toying with policies, little dreaming that the only salvation of his country was principle!

How soundly men sleep! Apparently awake, they bustle, and shout, send congratulatory telegrams and pass fulsome resolutions, assure and reassure themselves of triumph,

when as yet they have not taken the first step toward it. They are dreaming; they are illusioned; they are sound asleep.

O, Isaiah! Sennacherib and Tirhakah cannot settle anything! Wake up! open your eyes! Here is the King of kings! Behold Him, for He alone is Arbiter!

Isaiah was young when he slumbered, and he has always a great company of imitators! A teacher's mission is sacred because it is a call to slumbering Isaiahs! To hear a recitation, to mark a pupil, to correct papers, this is a small part of a teacher's work! Beyond, far, far beyond the mere imparting of information of information there lies the essential, the important task of waking the somnambulist! The reason why so many men who have greatly blessed the world were dunces in school was not because they lacked ability, but because they were permitted to walk in their sleep! When once their eyes were opened, and the vision of God, His word, His truth, were disclosed, then the days were too short, the nights too long; then the soul, bright-eyed, looked and loved! then teaching began, and the teacher found the pupil!

You cannot make a golden world beneath a gray sky; the sun must first kiss away the clouds! You cannot make a great spirit out of a slumbering soul; the scales of sleep must first fall from the eyes!

II. THE SEEING ISAIAH.

It came at last. The diplomatist and statesman beholds the real Plenipotentiary! The eye of the soul scans a divine horizon and beholds wondrous things; the ear of the soul hears the thrilling antiphonal "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts"; the heart of the soul beats quick with the sense of its own *impotence*; and then of its own *importance*; the spirit of the soul asks for a commission; it is an hour of reversals, of resolutions, of revelations. Isaiah beholds—God becomes real to him!

It is an apparent contradiction that in the luminous presence of the enthroned Lord, Isaiah should cry with one breath, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips," and with the next, "Here am I; send me." The contrite seems very near the conceited; the humble in disagreeable proximity with the haughty. But just beneath the apparent dilemma there is the substratum of a consoling truth; the vision of God reveals not only the misery but the meaning of one's life! Self-appreciation is the first corollary of self-abnegation! Let God show you the weakness of your life and He will not fail to exhibit at the same time its strength! Your weakness consists in what you have been willing to be; your strength in what God means you to be! Misfits are the devil's trademark—never the handiwork of God.

There is something to be done in the world, and one's ability to contribute his share is revealed in the vision of his God. The world is suffering far less from conceit than from spurious modesty. The light of many a man's real ability is quenched beneath the bushel of his self-depreciation. The man who hid his talent in a napkin and then grumbled before his master has left a numerous progeny. He ought to have known what his talent was good for; he might have known; the master would not accept the napkin in which he had wrapped the talent in place of accrued interest!

The Gospel is not merely an invitation: it is an imperative. Not only does it sweetly carol, "Come"; it strenuously commands, "Go!" God does not ask any man to abdicate the throne of his ability; He summons him to perfect and use it, recognizing its worth and emptying its content in serviceful ministry!

III. THE SERVING ISAIAH.

Back to his statecraft comes the man who has seen the vision; back to the old life with a new spirit; no longer is diplomacy crowned nor are votes all-powerful. Another standard has been raised, another ideal looms, another purpose declares itself. The true statesman appears, bold in his proclamation of unwelcome truth, calm in his vision of the temporary disaster which results from his plain speaking, patient in waiting for his truth to evidence itself, and restfully confident of the final result. Isaiah, in the poise and purpose of his new life, is, indeed, an imposing character. He is the educated man in politics!

A government has many members, but one body. Labour is the brawn of a government; capital is its blood, education its brain. Brawn, and blood, and brain, each have a separate and an important task to fulfill, but to the educated man comes the subtle temptation of withholding his gift to his country, because of the very nature of it. Isaiah had something to say which was startling; it traversed custom, was radical, strange and new. The ignorant would sneer at it as the impractical theory of a college-

bred man; the vested interests would scorn it as ridiculously puerile, so that no ordinary courage was required to face certain opposition, and, by insistently holding one's ground, allow the true idea to gradually take possession of the ordinary mind, and because absolute in fact to become so in law.

Questions which to-day are agitating the body politic are largely those on which educated men alone can throw light. The tariff; the currency; the abolition of war, are not questions which can be adjusted in the light of experience alone. They have long roots which reach into history, political economy, and through these into the very depths of justice, righteousness, and love. Here, then, is the call for the serving Isaiah! Let education set its torch of light in the midst! Regardless of popular applause or condemnation, let those who see declare their vision! Probably the first effect of such declaration will be a confusion which will seem a recession from, not an advance upon, present conditions. So it was in Isaiah's case; he started with the distinct understanding that apparent failure would be his portion. But what of that? "The trouble is," said a true-souled reformer, "that God does not seem to be in a hurry, and I am!" "When anybody rises to propose a solution, I move to adjourn," said a man, who had learned that reform was not a winged creature.

It is moreover a prime characteristic of the serving Isaiah, that amid all the contradictions of his message, and all the delays in its progress, his hope and his expectation is undisturbed! Come what may, cities without inhabitants, houses without man, land utterly desolate, yet "as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stock remaineth, when they are felled; so the holy seed is the stock thereof!"

There are two great classes of men in the world to-day: men of despair, and men of hope. One class sees only a storm captured sky, hears only muttering of angry thunder, expects only chaos; life is not worth living; they endure it with sullen spirit and when they go out of it "slam the door behind them." They have never seen God. They are pessimists! The other class sees a hope behind every horror, a smile beyond every tear. To-day may be very hard, but there will be another day; the present may be distressing, but the future is yet to be. They have seen God; they are optimists! They are the salt of the earth; they are the serving Isaiahs! One needs to take the time limit from his life in order to serve worthily and to hope royally! Faith in the remnant, that the oak which has cast its leaves shall yet provide shade, is reserved for those great spirits who have been apart with God. One springs to forlorn hopes, if in the barren promise he can see God! One discounts to-day if sure of to-morrow.

Here is the abiding promise for service: "Lo, I am with you." Here is the inspiring certainty: "He shall reign."

Isaiah

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"Isaiah the son of Amoz."—Isaiah i. 1.

Isaiah was raised up by God at the very period which, of all others, is most suited to the purposes of the delivery of prophecy. Both the kingdoms of Israel and of Judah had recovered much of their ancient greatness, the former under the second Jeroboam, the latter under Uzziah. This proved, indeed, to be but the last broad glare of the flickering lamp thrown forth before final extinction, and the good and the wise looked with fear and trembling upon its ominous unsteadiness. The people were corrupt, and therefore their fortunes depended entirely on the character of the single person who ruled them. The crash of ruin under a feeble or wicked king was heard while the glories of his successful predecessor were still dazzling the eyes of his subjects. At such a time the minds of men are peculiarly alive to the feelings on which it is the purpose of prophecy to work, and especially awake to the voice which calls them to look upon the future. The present prosperity gives them leisure to look around them, and its confessed instability suggests many and anxious thoughts upon the days to come. There is sufficient bliss for which to be heartily thankful, and sufficient apprehension to prevent their being engrossed with its enjoyment. The heart is too well exercised with solicitude for it to grow fat, and the eye too used to the long and eager sight into the future, for it to grow blind. Persons thus affected afford a fit audience for the Prophet. But we must not suppose that

their number composed more than sufficient to prevent his voice from being the voice of one speaking in the wilderness. Even at this most favourable of periods, such persons were comparatively few. The great body of the nation rejoiced in the transitory light as if it were permanent, and were ready to rise in vengeance upon him who should venture to interrupt their delightful vision. They deemed a traitor to his country the man who most feared for it, because he most loved it. It was only by men of reasonable fears that God's messengers were listened to, it was only from such that Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, obtained attention. But if they appealed to bosoms full of wholesome sorrow and fear, they spoke from bosoms still more full of the like affections; for they beheld the gloomy future not only in the broad and vague generality of political speculation, but also in all the affecting individuality of prophetic revelation. The place, the nation, the man, the year, the day, the hour, were known to them, and many of their predicted calamities they lived twice over, both in the certainty of prophetic foresight, and again in the palpability of actual occurrence. Miserable men, indeed, had they been, had not the God of prophecy been also the God of comfort.

Judging from the extraordinary length of time, which the period of Isaiah's prophetic commission took up, we must conclude that it began early in life. And his style shows that he had put to full use the education of the schools of the Prophets. He is richly endowed with those natural powers and acquirements to which the Holy Spirit gives increase, but which He has never, except on the day of the first Christian Pentecost superseded. From among a crowd of youths, all diligently trained for being suitable vessels of God's prophetic spirit, and anxiously awaiting their call from the quiet of their college, into the honourable perils of service, like good spiritual warriors, he was chosen and received his summons at the close of the long and golden reign of Uzziah. His inaugural vision was one of overpowering sublimity. The Holy of Holies, which never was open but to the high-priest, was opened to him, and there he beheld the Lord sitting in His glory on His Throne above the ark of the covenant, attended by His Cherubim, that responded to each other in that sublime Hymn, which has ever since been sung in the temple of the Church, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." There was announced to the trembling Prophet the incurable corruption of the people, their grossness of heart, their dulness of hearing. Judgment was pronounced upon them: their country was to be waste and desolate. But the Prophet was consoled by the assurance that, notwithstanding, the stock of the felled tree should remain for a holy seed. With this summary of the whole body of his prophecy, the Prophet went forth upon his mournful but heavenly commission. Perhaps he himself had previously entertained but inadequate notions of the desperate condition of his country. His seclusion and the hopefulness of youth would hide much of the evil from his eye during the prosperous days of Uzziah. But now his mind was fully illumined, and he had to preach to men who lay in still grosser darkness than that from which he had been freed,—mournful indeed was his errand. Ordinary preachers, unenlightened as they are to the future, can always go forth with hope. But Isaiah knew that the threats with which he was charged would certainly be executed. A part of his prophecy was daily fulfilled to him in the impenitent unbelief of his hearers. He felt that he was preaching to other times, and even other nations, and not his own. In the first chapter he pours forth his powerful and melancholy strain, describing those sins of his countrymen which were hastening on their ruin, denouncing their forgetfulness of God, their hypocrisy, their murder, their extortion. Intolerable had been his situation had he not been comforted by looking on to Him Whose coming he foresaw, like a streak of dawn seen on the edge of a stormy sea, through the intervals of its tossing waves. This was always in his view, and is seen even in the darkest of his predictions. As many painters have in every picture introduced some one favourite object which afterwards becomes the well-known token of their handy-work, so has Isaiah. Whatever horrible characters and scenes may occupy his foreground, however dark his sky, still we always discover the gleam of the promised dayspring in the welkin. This is the mark of this evangelical Prophet.

Sixteen years of Isaiah's commission had now elapsed, when God called him forth in a most conspicuous manner before his whole people. The occasion was one of the many symptoms of the approaching downfall of the whole family of Israel. The prosperity of the days of Uzziah had utterly gone. It had proved as transitory as the Prophet had forewarned that it would. The gloom thickened, and the feeble government of the

weak and idolatrous Ahaz invited the attacks of his neighbours. Under a judicial infatuation, Israel, ruled by Pekah, unnaturally combined with Rezin, king of Syria, against Judah, and the confederate forces laid siege to Jerusalem. Both king and people were in dreadful dismay. God sent Isaiah to reassure them, and to denounce judgment upon both the nations which had conspired against the house of David. For a sign, which Ahaz, more through infidelity than humility, refused to ask, the Prophet gave him the assurance, which to the house of David was the highest assurance of deliverance. He assured him that the great Deliverer, Who was to come to the lineage of David, Who should be called "God-with-us," should be born, born too of a virgin. Why should the house of David fear? For the palpable sign, he pointed to a virgin. By the time she had a son, of age to distinguish good and evil, the lands of these two kings should be desolate. But he stilled the presumption which the weak monarch was sure to conceive upon this announcement, by threatening him too with Egypt and Assyria, those names of terror to the children of Judah. Great, indeed, must have been the consolation of Isaiah when he received, and of believers when they heard, this most striking prophecy. It fills up, in some most important points, the outline of that which God had given to David respecting the endurance of his house. The figure of the Redeemer is distinct enough for hope to gaze on and be satisfied. But to the vulgar and unholy minds of Ahaz and the crowd, the present deliverance was enough; and the Prophet shortly again saw them forsake the Lord, Who had delivered them, for the gods of the Syrians, which had been proved so unable to help in the time of need. Here was a fresh and still more fearful instance than ever of the incurable malady of his country. His worst prophetic anticipations day by day assumed the solid form of passing realities; and ever as they emerged into the substantial light of the present, he heard the tread and murmur of many more behind in the darkness of the future. Thus the calamities of his country met this patriot everywhere. They appalled him sleeping and waking, by sights and visions of the day, by dreams and visions of the night. But he had another and better country which could not fail. His dwelling-place was in the Church of God.

Yet one hearer he had obtained, who as a boy of the tender age of ten years was standing by the side of his royal father, when Isaiah appeared before him with his message of deliverance and of visitation. The sight and the words of the holy man sank deep in the boy's mind; and if he had not formerly, he did then conceive serious and lasting impressions of holy thought and feeling. He had no sooner mounted the throne, than the seed sown by the Prophet disclosed its fruit in Hezekiah, and we faintly enter into the joy of Isaiah's heart when the youthful king set about the holy duty of restoring the worship of the Lord. Doubtless, God's Prophet lent all his help and encouragement, when the long-closed doors of the Temple were opened once more, the destroyed vessels were replaced, the intermitted sacrifices were renewed, and the Passover, that solemn act of allegiance to the Lord, was celebrated. It was indeed a joyous sight; but not even the mind of the politician, still less of the Prophet, could be cheated by it out of its well-founded despondency. For what did this same enthusiastic multitude when Ahaz defiled the temple with idols, mutilated its vessels, filled Jerusalem with idolatrous altars, and was seconded by the high-priest? It did as every corrupt people does. In such there is a prevailing laxity of principle, and every one is ready, for the sake of selfish indulgence, or from a base love of popularity, or from fear of ill-will, singularity, or ridicule, to acquiesce with an active leader or leading party, whether for right or for wrong. Thus independence of mind is gone, fashion becomes omnipotent, and all bow before the tyranny of the spirit of the times. From what other cause could Judah under Ahaz repudiate the Lord, under Hezekiah return to Him, under Manasseh reject Him, under Josiah restore Him, under Zedekiah reject Him again? So little comfort was this transitory burst of light likely to bring to Isaiah. He required as much as ever the comfort of the future day-spring from on high.

Meanwhile his darkest prediction had its fulfilment before his eyes. Israel had little more than time enough to mock at Hezekiah's invitation to the Lord's Passover, when prince and people were carried into unredeemable captivity by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. And Judah shortly received an awful warning from the same quarter. The Assyrian forces besieged Jerusalem. God called forth His Prophet to comfort His faithful servant Hezekiah, and he was commissioned to answer the blasphemous letter of defiance of the living God, which the Assyrian had sent. This he did in a strain of

noble indignation, of sublime mockery and rebuke, and hurled back his menaces with a terrible denunciation, which was accomplished on that very night.

But Isaiah had for once a commission of unmingled joy : and he is one of the few Prophets who ever appeared before a monarch of Israel or Judah with a welcome message from God. Hezekiah fell grievously sick, and was warned by Isaiah to set his house in order, for that he should die and not live. But before the Prophet had quitted the palace, the word of God came to him, and he was charged with the joyful errand of announcing to the king the certainty of his recovery, giving him at the same time the miraculous sign of the shadow going backward ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz. Thus he received his beloved master back from the grave ; and how delightful must it have been to announce an accession of fifteen years to his life, fifteen years more of religion and prosperous repose to his country. What an additional tie of reverence and affection must this have made between the king and the Prophet. But Isaiah was not always to be blessed with such pleasing commissions to his sovereign ; and notwithstanding that he was the mere instrument of God, he must have felt it a painful duty to communicate threatening messages. Such an occasion arose out of the very recovery which he had announced with so much joy. On the plea of congratulating Hezekiah, the ambassadors of the king of Babylon appeared at Jerusalem for the first time, the peaceful, though perhaps not undesigning, forerunners of her destined destroyer. In the foolish elevation of his heart the king showed them his treasury and armoury, and all the pride and strength both of his capital and of his kingdom. Thus a merciful respite from long-deserved destruction was interpreted into a prosperous tranquility, procured by his own arm, through his treasures of gold and magazines of iron. The Lord thought fit to rebuke this spirit, and to recall the king to the right understanding of his real situation. Isaiah appeared before him with the fatal announcement. He told Hezekiah that all these riches and stores, all which himself and his fathers had treasured up, should be carried off to Babylon, and that the children of his body should be eunuchs there in the king's palace. Hezekiah received the announcement with pious resignation, heartily thanking God for his long-suffering mercy in deferring the fulfilment until after his days.

How exquisitely touching are those passages where Cicero mentions the conversations which he had with his friends upon the miserable state and prospects of his country. Yet how comparatively trifling their interest to that of those which must have now past between Isaiah and his king. Religion could not enter into Cicero's views. But these men had the fortunes of the Church of God before them. The evil dreaded by the philosopher was the loss of public liberty. Before the eyes of these was extermination of their nation from the land. Even before this announcement from God, they might perhaps have suspected the quarter of their danger. Their old terror, Damascus, had been removed, according to the Prophet's prediction : Nineveh's days were numbered, and drawing to a close, faster even than those of Judah : Egypt had proved unequal to help Judah against the Assyrian, and was therefore still less likely to be able to snatch her as a prize from before the beak of the Babylonian eagle. To Babylon, therefore, king and Prophet had probably been turning their eyes, when now God's Word made all sure. Henceforward they went not on mere political speculation, which, however just, always leaves room for hope. They saw utter ruin, complete extermination, before them, as certain as God's Word. Yet they turned not away their faces from the appalling spectacle. They saw in it a messenger of good tidings. Destruction was to lead to a more glorious restoration, and was its pledge. Their city and temple were to fall, their kings and nobles, priests and prophets, were to go into captivity. But they could look onward to a heavenly city, an everlasting temple, to spiritual kings, and priests, and prophets, to One Who should lead captivity captive. To such topics would ever revert a conversation begun in despondency and fear. Compare, for a moment, with this the consolation of the forementioned philosophical patriot, whose grand remedy was but a self-delusion, sought in a sophistical juggle of words, and noblest practical motion, such as, "Grief's heaviest weight by bearing grows light."

The Prophet's days were now drawing towards a close. But he had turned all that had ears to hear, and eyes to see, to gaze more intently towards the day-spring which was to follow the night, already fast coming on. When he mounted his prophetic watch-tower, and surveyed his horizon, he saw the signs of fulfilment beginning to appear. The enemies of his country were, some of them, already under the hand of God. Damascus

lay as a city whose-consuming fire was already extinct. Others still standing, as Nineveh and Tyre, were sending forth smoky wreaths, which showed that their last hour had begun. On them, and on Babylon and Egypt, he denounced the fiery judgment of God, sang the restoration of his country, called on its restorer by name, and ended his triumphant strain with a description far more full and bright than had yet been accorded to Prophet, of the mighty King, before Whose coming all these proud nations, which had trampled on his country, were but the rough places to be made plain, and their ruins his highway in the desert. Before his song was finished, Hezekiah was removed from a throne, which was already tottering, to the throne of his spiritual royalty, which cannot be shaken; and Isaiah lost a friend and protector, and disciple.

He soon followed his royal master. Manasseh proved the reverse of his heavenly-minded father, and more than undid what he had so carefully done, in restoring the worship of the Lord. Such a man was not likely to spare the Prophets: for they had been his father's faithful counsellors, the Lord's devoted ministers, and the unflinching denouncers of the iniquities which he was committing. Of course, Isaiah was obnoxious beyond all the rest; both from superior influence with his late father, from his higher reputation as a Prophet, and from the greater boldness of his character. The corrupt and cowardly people looked tamely on, if they did not abet, the cruel persecution of those only real friends of their country. Tradition, which there seems no reason to dispute, asserts that Isaiah was put to a death of refined cruelty, by being sawn asunder with a wooden saw. Much of evil as he had seen, this holy man was taken away from still greater to come. So does God turn into unconscious instruments of mercy the cruel men who remove out of the way all who resist their ruinous acts and devices. He was thus spared the anguish of being an eye-witness of the repetition of even worse abominations than had pained his soul in the days of Ahaz, and saw not the unmasking of the dreadful hypocrisy of Judah. He was added to that long list of martyrs, whose blood cried out from the ground against Jerusalem; and which uttered a prelude, uninterrupted through ages, to the cry of the blood of that Holy One, which brought her final and irreversible destruction. He was one of those who prepared the way of Him that was to come, by sufferings and by blood, no less than by preaching.

Isaiah

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"Isaiah the son of Amoz."—*Isaiah i. 1.*

Isaiah stands out at once as the representative of his own age, and yet as a universal teacher of mankind. Whilst the other Prophets of the period in which he lived are known only to the bypaths of theology, in the quaint texts of remote preachers, Isaiah is a household word everywhere. For the first time since Elisha we have a Prophet, of whose life and aspect we can be said to have any details. He was statesman as well as Prophet. He lived not in the remote villages of Judah like Micah, or wandering over hill and dale like Elijah and Amos, but in the centre of all political life and activity. His whole thoughts take the colour of Jerusalem. He is the first Prophet specially attached to the capital and the court. He was, according to Jewish tradition, the cousin of Uzziah, his father Amoz being held to be a younger son of Joash. He wrote Uzziah's life (2 Chron. xxvi. 22); and his first Prophecies, beginning in the close of that reign, illustrate the reign of Jotham, as well as of the three succeeding sovereigns. His individual and domestic life was a kind of impersonation of the Prophetic office. His wife was a Prophetess. According to a practice which seems to have prevailed throughout his career as through that of his contemporary Hosea, he himself and his children all bear Prophetic names: "Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for a sign and a wonder in Israel from the Lord of Hosts." He had a circle of disciples (Isa. viii. 16), probably of Prophets, in whom his spirit was long continued. The length of his life, the grandeur of his social position, gave a force to what he said, beyond what was possible in the fleeting addresses of the humbler Prophets who had preceded him. There is a royal air in his attitude, in his movements, in the sweep of his vision, which commands attention. He was at once "great and faithful," in his "vision." Nothing escapes him in the events of his time. The older Prophetic writings are worked up by

him into his own words. He does not break with the past. He is not ashamed of building on the foundation of those who have gone before him. All that there is of general instruction in Joel, Micah, or Amos, is reproduced in Isaiah. But his style has its own marked peculiarity and novelty. The fierce impassioned addresses of Joel and Nahum, the abrupt strokes, the contorted turns of Hosea and Amos, giving way to something more of a continuous flow, where stanza succeeds to stanza, and canto to canto, with almost a natural sequence. Full of imagery as is his poetry, it still has a simplicity which was at that time so rare as to provoke the satire of the more popular Prophets. They, pushing to excess the nervous rhetoric of their predecessors, could not bear, as they expressed it, to be treated like children. "Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts!" These constant recurrences of the general truths of spiritual religion, majestic in their plainness, seemed to them mere common-place repetitions;—"precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." It is the universal complaint of the shallow inflated rhetoricians of the professedly religious world against original genius and apostolic simplicity, the complaint of the babblers of Ephesus against St. John, the protest of all scholastic and pedantic systems against the freeness and the breadth of a Greater than John or Isaiah. Such Divine utterances have always appeared defective, and unimpassioned, and indefinite, in the ears of those who crave for wilder excitement and more elaborate systems, but have no less found, for that very reason, a sure response in the child-like genuine, natural soul of every age.

The general objects of Isaiah's mission are best indicated in the account which he himself has left us of his call, or (as we should now describe it) his conversion to the Prophetic office.

"In the year that king Uzziah died," in the last year of that long reign of fifty-two years, as the life of the aged king, now on the verge of seventy, was drawing to its close in the retirement of the house of lepers, the young Isaiah was, or in vision seemed to be, in the court of the Temple. He stood at the gate of the porch, and gazed straight into the Holy Place, and into the Holy of Holies itself. All the intervening obstacles were removed. The great gates of cedar-wood were thrown open, the many-coloured veil that hung before the innermost sanctuary was drawn aside, and deep within was a Throne as of a King, high and lifted up, towering as if into the sky. What was the form that sat thereon, here, as elsewhere, the Scripture forbears to describe. Only by outward and inferior images, as to us by secondary causes, could the Divine Essence be expressed. The long drapery of His train filled the Temple, as "His glory fills the earth." Around the Throne, as the cherubs on each side of the mercy-seat, as the guards round the king, with head and feet veiled, figures floated like flying serpents, themselves glowing with the glory of which they were a part, whilst vast wings enfolded their faces and their feet, and supported them in mid-air round the Throne. From side to side went up a hymn of praise, which has since been incorporated in the worship of Christendom, and which expressed that He was there Who bore the great Name specially appropriated to the period of the Jewish monarchy and to the Prophetic order—"the Lord of Hosts." The sound of their voices rang like thunder to the extremity of the Temple. The pillars of the gate-way trembled, as if in another earthquake-shock, and the whole building within grew dark as with the smoke of a vast sacrifice. It was a sight and sound which the youthful Isaiah recognized at once as the intimation of Divinity. It was the revelation of the Divine Presence to him, as that of the Burning Bush to Moses, or of the Still Small Voice to Elijah,—the inevitable prelude to a Prophetic mission, couched in the form most congenial to his own character and situation. To him, the Royal Prophet of Jerusalem, this manifestation of royal splendour was the almost necessary vesture in which the Spiritual Truth was to be clothed. All his own sins—we know not what they were—and the sins of his nation—as we know them from himself and the contemporary Prophets—passed before him, and he said, "Woe is me, for I am lost, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." . . . On these defiled lips, therefore, the purifying touch was laid. From the flaming altar, the flaming Seraph brought a flaming coal. This was the creation, so to speak, of that marvellous style which has entranced the world; the burning furnace which warms, as with a central fire, every variety of his addresses. Then came the voice from the sanctuary, saying, "Whom shall I send, who will go for Us?" With unhesitating devotion the youth replied, "Here am I; send

me!" In the words that follow is represented the whole of the Prophet's career. First, he is forewarned of the forlorn hopelessness of his mission. The louder and more earnest is his cry, the less will they hear and understand—the more clearly he sets the vision of truth before them, the less will they see. "Make the heart of this people gross, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and healed." These mournful words, well-known to us through their fivefold repetition in the New Testament as the description of the Jewish people in its latest stage of decay, were doubtless true in the highest degree of that wayward generation to which Isaiah was called to speak. His spirit sank within him, and he asked "O Lord, how long?" The reply unfolded at once the darker and the brighter side of the future. Not till successive invasions had wasted the cities, not till the houses had been left without a human being within them, not till the land had been desolate with desolation, would a better hope dawn; not till the invasions of Pekah and Sennacherib had done their work, not till ten out of the twelve tribes had been removed far away, and there should have been a great forsaking in the midst of the land, would he be relieved from the necessity of delivering his stern, but fruitless warnings, against the idolatry, the dulness, the injustice of his people. But widely-spread and deeply-seated as was the national corruption, there was still a sound portion left, which would live on and flourish. As the aged oak of terebinth of Palestine may be shattered, and cut down to the very roots, and yet out of the withered stump a new shoot may spring forth, and grow into a mighty and vigorous tree, so is the holy seed, the faithful few, of the chosen people. This is the true consolation of all Ecclesiastical history. It is a thought which is but little recognized in its earlier and ruder stages, when the inward and outward are easily confounded together. But it is the very message of life to a more refined and complex age, and it was the key-note to the whole of Isaiah's prophecies. It had, indeed, been dimly indicated to Elijah, in the promise of the few who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and in the still small whisper which was greater than thunder, earthquake, and fire. But in Isaiah's time it first, if we may say so, became a living doctrine of the Jewish Church, and through him an inheritance of the Christian Church. "*A remnant—the remnant*": this was his watchword. "The remnant shall return." This was the truth constantly personified before him in the name of his eldest son. A remnant of good in the mass of corruption, a remnant saved from the destructive invasions of Assyria, a burst of spring-time in the Reformation of Hezekiah; and, far away in the distant future, a rod out of the stem, the worn-out stem of Jesse—a branch, a genuine branch, out of the withered root of David; "and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly, even with joy and singing, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Such was the hope and trust which sustained the Prophet through his sixty years of toil and conflict. In the weakness of Ahaz, in the calamities of Hezekiah, under the tyranny of Manasseh, Isaiah remained firm and steadfast to the end. Wider and wider his views opened, as the nearer prospects of his country grew darker and darker. First of the Prophets, he and those who followed him seized with unreserved confidence the mighty thought, that not in the chosen people, so much as in the nations outside of it, was to be found the ultimate well-being of man, the surest favour of God. Truly might the Apostle say that Isaiah was "very bold"—"bold beyond" all that had gone before him—in enlarging the boundaries of the Church; bold with that boldness, and large with that largeness of view, which so far from weakening the hold on things divine, strengthens it to a degree unknown in less comprehensive minds. For to him also, with a distinctness which makes all other anticipations look pale in comparison, a distinctness which grew with his advancing years, was revealed the coming of a Son of David, who should restore the royal house of Judah and gather the nations under its sceptre. If some of these predictions belong to that phase of the Israelite hope of an earthly empire, which was doomed to disappointment and reversal, yet the larger part point to a glory which has been more than realised. Lineament after lineament of that Divine Ruler was gradually drawn by Isaiah or his scholars, until at last a Figure stands forth, so marvellously combined of power and gentleness and suffering, as to present in the united proportions of his descriptions the moral features of an historical Person, such as has been, by universal confession, known once, and once only, in the subsequent annals of the world.

The task laid upon the Prophet was difficult, the times were dark. But his reward has been that, in spite of the opposition, the contempt, and the ridicule of his contemporaries, he has in after ages been regarded as the messenger, not of sad but of glad tidings, the Evangelical Prophet, the Prophet of the Gospel, in accordance with the meaning of his own name, which he himself regarded as charged with Prophetic significance—"the Divine Salvation."

No other Prophet is so frequently cited in the New Testament, for none other so nearly comes up to the spirit of Christ and the Apostles. No other single teacher of the Jewish Church has so worked his way into the heart of Christendom. When Augustine asked Ambrose which of the sacred books was best to be studied after his conversion, the answer was "Isaiah." The greatest musical composition of modern times, embodying more than any single confession of faith the sentiments of the whole Christian Church, is based in far the larger part on the Prophecies of Isaiah. The wild tribes of New Zealand seized his magnificent strains as if belonging to their own national songs, and chanted them from hill to hill, with all the delight of a newly discovered treasure. And, as in his age, so in our own, he must be pre-eminently regarded as "the bard rapt into future times!" None other of ancient days so fully shared with the modern philosopher, or reformer, or pastor, the sorrowful yet exalted privilege of standing, as we say, "in advance of his age," "before his time." Through his prophetic gaze we may look forward across a dark and stormy present to the onward destiny of our race, which must also be the hope of each aspiring soul—"When the eyes of them that see shall not be dim,—when the ears of them that hear shall hearken—when the vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful—when the liberal shall devise liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand,—when Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim,—when thine eyes shall behold the King in His beauty, and see the land that is very far off."

Jeremiah

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"On that my head were waters," etc.—Jeremiah ix. 1, 2.

I have chosen these words of the text as expressing the character itself and life of the Prophet Jeremiah. He lived in the time of the good king Josiah; both were as children called of God; and engaged in the same work of reformation before the judgments came on Jerusalem. The one sets forth the kingly, and the other the prophetic office, which were both found combined in Christ.

But Jeremiah not only represents Christ as a Prophet, but that peculiar designation of Him as such which is expressed by Moses: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me." "Of thy brethren," one peculiarly full of brotherly affections, and "from the midst of thee," *i.e.* "the Son of Man," nay, the "Man of Sorrows," one in Himself all humanity; and yet more, "like unto me," even as the meekest of men, as if to mark yet more strongly this characteristic. Our Blessed Saviour was beyond all men full of human tenderness, compassionate, such as was represented by the living Body stretched upon the dead; with limb answering to limb; the feeling with the unfeeling; the warm with the cold; thus was He full of sympathy with our infirmities, as alive in every part with a fellow-feeling for us. He was clothed all over, and compassed about on every side with pity, such as one most tender-hearted amongst mankind feels in the most intimate relations of life; as a mother, as a brother, as an husband. And this rendered Him as a victim so full of sorrow and "acquainted with grief," when He came to a people about to be overwhelmed with the consequences of their sins. "In all their affliction He was afflicted." In a manner most intimate, deep, and penetrative, "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." We might conceive it otherwise; God might have executed His judgments, as a stern Judge, Himself unmoved. But it is not so; the Judge Himself bears the heavy burden; and has made Himself one with us that He might carry our griefs. Now all this speaks to us through Jeremiah; his natural character was peculiarly suited for this; he was chosen and sanctified from his mother's womb for this purpose.

So that there was more meaning in it than they knew who, when they saw our Lord's sufferings and compassions, said it was "Jeremiah." Not only that it was "one of the Prophets," arisen from the dead, but especially mentioning Jeremiah.

It was, I observe, founded in the natural disposition of Jeremiah, hallowed of God for this end before his birth. "Before I formed thee in the belly," said God, "and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a Prophet." Hence his writings are marked especially with this character throughout. For though these prophecies are the Word of God speaking to us thereby; yet they partake throughout of the Prophet's own natural mind. Like as the light of the sun falling through a painted window; it is still the light of the sun though it partakes of the colour through which it passes to us. Thus Jeremiah is considered by the ancients to be in the words of one of them, "the most inclined to pity of all the Prophets."

The times in which he lived were exceedingly sad; his whole life was intimately connected with the ruin and breaking down of the people of Israel, filling up the measure of their iniquities, adding sin to sin, and with it increasing their miseries and sorrows to the last. The good king was cut off as too good for that people, but the Prophet remained. Jeremiah continued with them throughout even to the last remnant that was left in Israel, and afterwards with that remnant doomed to judgment in Egypt. The King of Babylon would have done him honour, and kept him in safety and peace: but he stayed behind, as if to the last dregs drinking with them of their cup of sorrows. This was of itself very mournful and distressing; but it was that heart in Jeremiah so full of tender sympathies which increased the intensity of his sufferings. It is therefore in this respect that he so especially brings home to us the sorrows of Christ: as the good Samaritan, stopping to take care of the wounded man, and putting him on his own beast; as suffering with us and for us. He says in the Lamentations, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath." This is spoken by the Prophet of Himself, and of Christ; it is spoken of them both in their suffering with the suffering Israel of God. Nor is all this any thing that is passed and gone. It is to every human soul that the Word of God speaks in Jeremiah; speaks of the compassions of God towards him in Christ; it speaks of Christ: and at the same time it is Christ Himself therein speaking to each one; and drawing out His expressions of infinite concern and mercy.

Our Lord is represented in a well-known picture as the good Shepherd taking a lost sheep out of the thorns; and Himself in so doing as wearing a crown of thorns with a bleeding countenance. It is this throughout that speaks in the Prophet Jeremiah. It is the bleeding Shepherd extricating His lost sheep from among the thorns of the world. It is purposely so ordered of God; the penitent of all ages and countries in studying the Bible in order to know God and himself, does naturally read the Prophet Jeremiah under this impression; whether he stops to contemplate the fact or no, so it is; the feeling with which a devout person looks on that representation of Christ, of which I am speaking, is like that which the reverential reader experiences when hearing in Jeremiah the voice of the good shepherd.

Nor is this all, for Jeremiah was in the meanwhile made also like unto Christ in suffering himself from others, while he suffered with them and for them; for as a witness of God he was hated, smitten, imprisoned, and at last, it is supposed, stoned to death. Indeed, that he should have lived so long among them was like a continual miracle vouchsafed to him of God, Who gave him this promise. "Gird up thy loins, and arise and speak unto them—be not dismayed at their faces—for behold I have made thee a defended city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land: . . . and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail." This was repeated to him more than once. Thus he was made to suffer, and preserved in life that he might suffer, in bearing the heavy burden of God; to exhibit unto us our Lord Himself. For instance, how like as of Christ Himself are these words, "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, . . . but O Lord of Hosts, that judgest righteously, . . . unto Thee have I revealed my cause." And this was said by the Prophet of the men of Anathoth, the Prophet's own native place, who were seeking his life. And in like manner it was the men of Nazareth, His own city, who first attempted our Lord's life. "He came unto His own, but His own received Him not." Now it is then this home relation, this tenderness of human pity, these the motherly compassions of Him that was

born of woman, not of man, this love of Christ compassing about the soul of man, that Jeremiah speaks throughout. The very first mention of him is of this character. Jeremiah when called to his high office says, "Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." Thus was represented the Gospel, strong in weakness. It speaks of the times in which, as the Prophet Isaiah describes, a little "child shall lead them";—when a little child was set in the midst of Apostles, as their example, and as the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

And then after the Prophet Jeremiah is thus called and strengthened with the promised protection of God, what an exceeding tenderness is there in the first words which he delivers from God to His people, how do they serve to express the character of all his prophecies which follow? "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness." "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me?" Wonderful to say, it is God that thus speaks, and not man, but so full of human affections, that we hear Him in His Prophet while His Prophet himself speaks. And sometimes the Prophet turns himself to God, as it were in surprise at these messages of God which he has to bear. "Ah, Lord God," he says, "Thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands," "the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of Hosts is His Name."

But more particularly,—with regard to that expression, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals,"—it is this figurative allusion to lost affection, and to the remembrances of "first love," which is so common in this Prophet. And that usual image under which the grief of Christ is expressed by him, is that of all the most bitter, most intimately reaching the affections of the human heart, that of an husband bewailing an unfaithful wife. "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me days without number. Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?" "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?" And again, "What hath My beloved to do in Mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many?" "Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you." And further on; "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord." "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Now all this is typical and expressive of the dealings of Christ with a human soul, His intimate relation to it, His tender, unwearied love. It speaks in every part of a life nourished by the death of Christ, which has its existence in His flesh and blood; and cannot be sustained but in Him; the Bride taken as it were from His bleeding side in death. And alas! it speaks also of the unfaithfulness which we are to expect even in the members of His Body.

Frequent also in this Prophet are expressions drawn from another most tender of human relationships, that of a parent. "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My father, Thou art the guide of my youth?" And again, "But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land?" "And I said, Thou shalt call Me, My father; and shalt not turn away from Me." The full force, too, of this figure can only be known in that new relationship into which we Christians have been brought as children of God, saying by the Spirit, Abba, Father. It anticipates those appeals to us in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount on God's more than fatherly love; throughout the whole of which we are addressed as the children of our Father Who is in Heaven.

But even when these figures of natural affection are not used, and the Prophet speaks in his own person, it is of a like spirit and character of tender-hearted compassion, even unto death. "When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me." "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore." Must we not think that this opens to us some intimation of our Lord's own secret sorrows; of the heavy untold anguish which was in the bitterness of that cup which He drank? of His "sighs," of His "groaning deeply in spirit," of His "strong crying and tears"? And from expostulating with his people, the Prophet turns in a like strain to expostulate with God Himself in their behalf, making himself one with that sinful people. "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us; for we have sinned against Thee." "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest Thou be as a man astonished, as a

mighty man that cannot save? Yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy name; leave us not."

There is indeed in this Prophet great sadness, almost verging on despair, for had he not reason for despair? "Can the Ethiopian," says he, "change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Sinking under the heavy burden, he curses the day wherein he was born. Yet it is not all of this character, very much the reverse.

As our Lord, when His hour was come, and the night of His great sorrow, spake so much of comfort to His disciples; and looking beyond the cloud rejoiced under that great tribulation, and spake more than ever of peace; so this His Prophet, who speaks so much of His sorrows, turns also at last to the consolations that are in Christ; and describes the morning of Resurrection illuming the night of the grave. He sees no longer the captivity, but the restoration beyond it, and in that restoration the pledges and types of the Gospel; "Fear thou not, O Jacob My servant, saith the Lord; for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee." Strange that there is no part of Scripture so full of comfort as those chapters in St. John's Gospel on the saddest of all sad nights, when our Lord, under the sense of that coming agony, gave His Body and Blood to His disciples. So full is all the account of joy and thanksgiving, and yet at the same time of unspeakable sorrow. In like manner, perhaps, there are no passages in Scripture, unless it be those our Lord's last Eucharistic discourses, so eloquent of love and consolations as the 31st chapter of Jeremiah,—and we may add the 33rd also. No words can be found in any language of more touching beauty than all that strain. And indeed so similar in tone is it to those passages I have spoken of in the Gospel, that it is chosen by our Church for the Evening Lesson of that Thursday night in the Holy Week. The Prophet, in bearing the good tidings, speaks as one awakening after a deliverance from some terrible affliction. For he had said, "Woe unto us; for the day goeth away; for the shadows of evening are stretched out." He had said, "I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me." But now, in the 31st chapter, he says, "Upon this I awaked, and beheld, and my sleep was sweet unto me." All is changed, the very tenderness of his former woes adds to the intensity of the expressions of joy. "Rachel weeping for her children" is comforted, and they are come again from death. Ephraim is again remembered as a dear son, and received with the overflowing compassions of a father. The virgin of Israel hath come again. In their heart is written holiness by the finger of God, and their sins are remembered no more. With weeping and supplications do they come, but they shall sorrow no more at all. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." Nay, yet more than this, "the nations of the earth shall hear all the good that I do," "they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness." The voice of joy, the voice of the Bridegroom, and the voice of the Bride shall be heard, and of them that say, "Praise the Lord, for He is good." Such are but allusions to that outpouring strain of consolation and joy with which this Prophet speaks in the desolations of Judah.

The Prophet Jeremiah is much to be considered in days like the present, when "the overflowings of ungodliness make us afraid" of what is coming on; and by means of the Press, "the fiery darts of the wicked one" are weekly and daily spread abroad, encompass us on all sides, and forcibly bring before us the character of the days in which we live. In these the tenderness of Jeremiah, the hatred of evil together with so much compassion, such appeals to God, and from God to man, such prayers for those who pray not for themselves, are most seasonable. He will teach us sorrow rather than anger; expostulation instead of desponding silence. But this, after all, is but a secondary study of this Prophet. It is as setting forth the compassions of Christ towards ourselves, His love for the Christian soul which He has so dearly purchased, His intimate knowledge of it and regard for it. And as arising out of this, we learn from him in the second place, the compassion we ourselves ought to have for others, and especially in reproving and correcting them. For in this all God's people in one sense are Prophets; in that by the Spirit of God they ought to improve and reform each other. And this can never be done effectually, unless it is with much charity, and in the fear of God.

A Christian must be in the world, like his Master, a "man of sorrows," not merely on account of his own personal sufferings, but because he is in a sinful world; and the more holy he becomes, the more must he be "acquainted with grief"; for as Heaven

is the abode of happiness because of holiness; so this earth must be the abode of sorrow because of sin; the servant of Christ must live in a world of his own, apart from that which is without, in the thoughts of his heart; if the world hates him because he is not of the world, but is born of God, so likewise must he hate the world; and this implies desolation of heart and mourning; and the more this mourning is, the more will his consolation abound. Thus not mourning only, but joy and peace are his portion.

Jeremiah

BY RIGHT REV. CHRISTOPHER WORDSWORTH, D.D.

"Behold I have made thee this day a defenced city," etc.—Jeremiah i. 18.

The prophetic mission of Jeremiah at Jerusalem lasted about forty years, dating from the thirteenth year of the good King Josiah, and closing with the fall of Jerusalem in the eleventh year of his son Zedekiah.

These forty years of probation granted to Jerusalem, during Jeremiah's prophetic ministry, may be compared with the forty years, beginning with our Lord's mission inaugurated at the river Jordan, and continued in His Apostles sent by Him and filled by the Holy Ghost given by Him from Heaven, and preaching of coming judgments to Jerusalem, until the time of its destruction by the armies of imperial Rome.

After the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, Jeremiah prophesied in a heathen land, Egypt; and, similarly, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the prophetic work of Christ was extended to the heathen world.

There is no Prophet in the Old Testament whose life, as displayed in his writings, extends over so long a period in a time of great public difficulty, and with whom we are so familiar as Jeremiah. His prophecies are his autobiography. They reveal the inmost workings of his soul from his youth to his old age. He does not conceal from us his weaknesses. "I am a child," he says, "I cannot speak." He does not disguise from us his impatience and his disappointments; he reveals his feelings of discontent, and records his words of murmuring: "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and contention to the whole earth!" He does not hide from us, that, like Jonah, he shrank back from his prophetic work; through fear of scorn, and insult, and persecutions, not only from men in high place and power, but even from his own friends and relations in his native town, Anathoth. His brethren, he tells us, the house of his father, dealt treacherously with him, and sought his life, and said, "Prophecy not to us in the Name of the Lord, that thou die not by our hand." And therefore he exclaimed: "Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them." He was also bitterly distressed by the seeming failure of his own prophecies and of his ministerial labours: "Behold they say unto me, Where is the Word of the Lord? let it come now." He is staggered and perplexed by the fact, that he himself, the Prophet of the Lord God of Israel, is the victim of injury, and that his enemies and the adversaries of the Lord triumph over him. "Wherefore," he asks, "doth the way of the wicked prosper, wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" He complains of his seeming desertion by God: "Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt Thou, O God, be to me altogether as a liar, and as waters that fail?" He expostulates and remonstrates with God, saying that he had not coveted the prophetic office, and had not desired to be a messenger of woe to his people, and that he had been constrained to utter his prophecies by the overpowering force of God. "I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His Name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. All my familiars watched for my halting." And in a moment of despondency and anguish of soul, like another Job, he cursed the day of his birth: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad."

Nor was this all. Jeremiah was commanded to go forth and declare God's sternest

judgments on Jerusalem; and yet he was a man of the most loving spirit, and tender affection. His heart was well-nigh bursting with sorrow when he thought of the terrible message which he was ordered to deliver. What a wonderful depth of sympathy is there in that piteous ejaculation, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

Brethren, these things are full of instruction to ourselves. Each of us, whatever our calling, has a commission from God. Each has a message from Him to deliver, in evil days. In a certain sense, we are all Jeremiahs. And this is specially true with regard to some among us. You, my younger hearers, who are candidates for the sacred ministry, will often feel as he felt. You may often find yourselves saying within yourselves, "I am a child and cannot speak." When you are called upon to encounter dangerous error and to reprove deadly sin; when it is your duty to stand forth as Jeremiah among the many, the powerful, and the great; whenever it is your mission to denounce God's judgments upon that dangerous error or deadly sin, although that error and sin may be patronized by some who are greatly your superiors in age and station, and, it may be, in intellectual gifts, and literary and scientific attainments, you may then perhaps feel your heart sink within you, and may ask yourself the question, Who am I that I should do this? You may long to retire from your post at Anathoth or Jerusalem, and may sigh for some lodge in the wilderness. You may perhaps be tempted to repine at your lot, and even to murmur at God, for calling you to the priestly and prophetic office; and to arraign the dispensations of His providence in allowing wickedness to prosper, and in seeming to forsake His ministers, and to allow His truth to fail. Do not be surprised at this. Strange it would be, if in times of severe trial such emotions as these did not sometimes arise within you. They were felt by Jeremiah. But remember him: think of his sufferings. He stood alone in a godless age. God did not allow him to take to himself a partner of his sorrows. He had no wife to comfort him, as Isaiah had. His own flesh and blood forsook him. His own fellow-townsmen of Anathoth sought his life and hooted at him in the streets, and went about to kill him as a false prophet. He was smitten and put in the stocks by Pashur, who had chief authority in the house of God. The sanguinary King Jehoiakim sought his life, and the weak and vacillating Zedekiah surrendered him to his enemies. At first some of the princes interceded for him; but they also forsook him, and conspired with the priests and false prophets against him. At the close of his forty years' mission, when the Chaldeans were at the gates, and Jerusalem was near her fall, they cast the Prophet into the pit, or cistern, of the state prison, and left him there to sink in the mire and starve. And the only person in the holy city, Jerusalem, who was found to have pity on God's Prophet Jeremiah was a stranger, an Ethiopian eunuch, Ebedmelech.

Observe now this. Jeremiah's words of weakness, timidity, and impatience belong to the earlier stage of his career. As his sufferings became more intense he received more grace from God, and gained fresh courage, and derived inspiration from difficulty and danger. As time passed on, he who once himself had faltered was enabled to encourage others. His dear friend and secretary, Baruch, seems to have been a person of honourable family; Baruch's brother Seraiah attained to a high position as chamberlain in the court of Zedekiah, and enjoyed the royal favour; and Baruch appears to have aspired to advancement in public life. But his connexion with Jeremiah, the stern reprover of courtly and princely vices, frustrated his hopes and obstructed his rise. Baruch was a faithful and steadfast friend to Jeremiah, and executed his commands in writing and reading the prophetic roll which denounced woe on the princes and people of Jerusalem. Baruch's life was threatened as well as that of Jeremiah; and he murmured for the failure of all earthly hopes, and he shrank back with fear, and said, "Woe is me! the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow: I fainted in my sighing, and I found no rest." Then Jeremiah assured him of protection, and consoled him for the loss of worldly advancement: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not."

Yet further, Jeremiah the Prophet of suffering, not only was enabled by God to triumph over difficulty and danger, and to give comfort to his own friends in distress, but he was also a divine minister of consolation and joy to the whole Hebrew nation, whether in the city of Jerusalem or scattered throughout the world. He cheered them with bright hopes of the future, and with glorious promises of Him, Whose Gospel was to go forth from Zion to gladden the hearts of all nations. And it is surely a marvellous thing, that the most glowing prophecies of Jeremiah, concerning the future triumphs of the Gospel

of Christ, and the glory of God's Church, (which was to have its origin at Jerusalem,) and the infinite joy and eternal splendours of the coming Kingdom of Christ: all blaze forth from the darkest cloud of the woes of Jerusalem, and from the thickest darkness of Jeremiah's sufferings. The midnight of his human sorrow was the noonday of his prophetic glory. The twenty-eighth to the end of the thirty-third chapters of Jeremiah, which foretell the graces of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and our justification in Him Who is "the Lord our Righteousness"; and the extension of the Church of God from Jerusalem to enfold all nations; and the eternal monarchy and priesthood of Christ; and His victory over sin and death; and our resurrection to glory through Him; and the spiritual graces of His Church; and the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit; and the blessings of the new Covenant of grace, and love, and peace,—all belong to the last days of Jerusalem, when the magnificent fabric of its Temple was about to sink into the dust, and its walls and princely palaces were about to be thrown prostrate on the ground.

Whence was this light from darkness? It was the work of God's grace, given to the Prophet's prayer, and working together with his will.

The *name* of Jeremiah, like that of the other Hebrew Prophets, is significant. Some have supposed that it implies that he was *exalted* by the *Lord*. Others assert with more probability that it means *set* by the *Lord*, as a solid foundation; or *sent* forth by the *Lord*, as lightning from the cloud, or as an arrow from a bow.

Whichever etymology we adopt, the name Jeremiah intimates, that whatever he did and whatever he suffered, all was *from the Lord*. The Lord worked in him, and by him. The Lord had said to him, "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: I am with thee to deliver thee. I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down and destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For behold I have made thee a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and a brasen wall against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

This was the mission of Jeremiah, and he had grace to accomplish it; he stood firm for forty years, alone in a rebellious and godless nation of adversaries and persecutors. He was set by God's hand as a solitary beacon on a lofty tower, in a dark night, in a stormy sea; lashed by waves and winds, but never shaken from his foundations. He was insulted, mocked, beaten and imprisoned. His warnings were despised and rejected, but they were the words of God; his prophecy concerning the false prophet Hananiah, his prophecies concerning the last four kings of Judah—Shallum, Jeconiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah,—were all exactly fulfilled in his own age; his predictions that Egypt, to whom the kings of Judah resorted for aid against Babylon, would not be able to succour her; and that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Chaldeans, and that Egypt itself would be subdued by them, were accomplished in his own times. The armies of Babylon, who burned the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, wrote, as it were, in characters of fire the evidence of Jeremiah's mission from God. Jeremiah was strengthened by these proofs of his own divine legation; but he was not elated by the abundance of his revelations, and by these signal tokens of God's special favour to him. No; though as a Prophet he had been strengthened by God, and raised to a lofty eminence above all his contemporaries in Jerusalem, yet he still felt as before. He was still the same tender-hearted and sympathising man, the same loyal subject, and the same devoted patriot. His own sufferings made him more compassionate for those of others. The destruction of Jerusalem was the proof of his mission from Heaven, but after that terrible catastrophe, Jeremiah went down from the heights of Mizpah, to which he had been conducted by Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, and he there sat down on the ground as a mourner amid the ruins of Sion, and poured forth his Lamentations over her.

Jeremiah

BY REV. AUSTIN PHELPS, D.D.

"Oh that my head were waters," etc. Jeremiah ix. 1.

The "Weeping Prophet" is the title often given to Jeremiah. He is not a popular Prophet. Unhappy men are not commonly popular men. Yet this one had ample reason for the depression under which he lived, and the minor key which runs through the strain of his writings. He was very far from being a morose man. He did not mourn over disappointed ambitions of his youth. He was not soured at the world's injustice. He wasted no melodrama over the "cold, cold world." He was the last man living to be a misanthrope.

What was it that made this very able and godly man so miserable? Why should he, more than other men, be given over to lifelong sorrow?

The answer is this. He had a most delicately sensitive nature, a most profound attachment to the cause of God, an intense patriotic love of his native land; yet it was his lot to live at an age when the people of God had fallen into most fearful apostasy, and the most terrific judgments were impending over them. It was given to him to see those judgments hurrying on apace. He heard angels of retribution on the wings of the wind. He saw their sabres flashing in the sun.

Moreover, it was his mission to tell the people of their sins, to rebuke the nobles for their oppression, the humbler orders for their vileness, the priesthood for their falseness, even his fellow-prophets for their infidelity to the living God. The whole nation, from prince to beggar, had reached the very bottom of national depravity; and this lone man was set to tell them of it, and to forewarn them of the frightful doom which was impending. He was the Prophet of unwelcome truth. He had to face the facts of an age of retribution. He had to tear away the illusions with which people were deceiving themselves. They were bragging of the recovery of the Bible, which Josiah had found in the rubbish of their desecrated temple. They claimed that that sacred treasure was going to make all things right with them. They treated it much as an African savage regards the fetich which he worships, or the amulet which he wears around his neck. The possession of the Sacred Book, they thought, would save them. This young Prophet knew better, and he had to tell them so.

The recovered Bible had come too late to save them, just as Christianity now comes to some savage tribes too late to save them from extermination. The people did not want to hear his story. He was a croaker. They wanted to hear somebody who would give them a pleasanter discourse. People who are living in sin, and who know it, are sometimes very fond of "beautiful sermons." They will bear any thing better than the simple truth. Beauty is more popular than truth.

Besides, this unpopular preacher stood alone. Not another one of the prophetic order stood by him. The only friend he had was one Baruch, an obscure scribe; and even he got sadly frightened at the plain talk of his outspoken friend. The priests too, hated him as a renegade. All classes—some for one reason, and some for another—agreed in their spite against this solitary truth-teller. Like Bunyan and many another unpalatable preacher, he got himself into prison for his fidelity. For forty years it was his business to deliver his warnings and rebukes and threatenings, word for word, as God bade him, to nobles and priests and people who were bent on destruction, and determined not to be saved by God or man.

To him belongs the distinction of first suffering the burning of the Word of God by the enraged king who would not listen to his reproofs. Many times after his day, faithful preachers and reformers saw the Bible burned in the market-place by royal and papal decree. But the first in the long line of such honoured men was this despondent Prophet of Judæa. On him Satan first wreaked that form of impotent revenge. As if a truth could be burned with a flaming scroll!

A singular fact also is it, that this solitary preacher, the butt of a nation's ridicule, does not seem to have been made for such work. He had a delicate and retiring nature. Gentle and unselfish was he, like a loving woman. When the sombre truth first dawns upon his early manhood, and he sees the work he has to do, he breaks out with the

despairing cry, "Ah, Lord! I cannot speak! I am but a child!" So overwhelmed is he by the sight of his country's shame, and the foresight of her doom, that he exclaims, "Oh that my head were waters, that I might weep day and night for the daughter of my people!" His writings show, by their chosen imagery, that he longs for solitude. He hungers to get away from the sins and sorrows of his time. Cowper's refrain, "Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness!" would have expressed the habit of his mind. He "sits alone, and keeps silence, crouching under his burden."

It is very significant of the despair of his soul, that he lives a celibate life. It is not for such a man as he to seek the dear delights of family and companionships of home. His great life's work is too sad, too heart-breaking. He will not venture to lay the hali of it on the heart of any woman. At times, when the solitude of it, and the blackness of it, and the funeral dirge of it, become intolerable, he heaps curses on the day of his birth. True to his Oriental instincts, he curses the very messenger who bore the glad news to his father that a boy was born to bear his name. Yes, he is the Prophet of the Broken Heart. The sins of his people are a lifelong grief to him. His own work, as their spiritual teacher, overwhelms him. The mystery of his life is, why he, of all men living, should have been called to such a mission, among such a people, on the eve of their destruction, too late to do them any good; when all that he can do is to proclaim to them the judgments with which they are soon to be overtaken.

To his own times and people he was the Prophet of doom. So far as they were concerned, his work ended there. Not so in the fore-reaching design of God. Jeremiah "buildd better than he knew." He did an unconscious work for coming ages. Imperfect man as he was, he was the forerunner of the *spiritual* disclosures of the new dispensation. The old dispensation was near its end. Its sun was going down in blood-red clouds. But the spiritual meaning of the ancient forms and rites was coming slowly to the light. To no other Prophet of the olden time, unless it be Isaiah, do we turn for glimpses of it as we do to this despairing one. The very burden of his soul pressed it out of him. He was driven to fall back upon the spiritual truths and consolations which his own soul needed. His very sins made them a necessity to him. Nothing else could save him from mania or suicide. God thus *used* him, his sorrows, his self-conflicts, his errors, his sins.

1. Jeremiah represents a class of good men and women of whom some exist in every age. There are some good men of whom it must be conceded that they are not gay Christians. From their make, and from the disclosures of truth which God gives them, they cannot be. They have a peculiarly sensitive and deep nature. They have profound intuitions. Their religion is proportionately deep and tender. In all this world's history, nothing else is so startling a *fact* to them as that this is a lost world, estranged from God, on its way, but for God's loving grace, to an eternal and awful doom.

These men and women are often blamed for being gloomy. In their hearts they answer, "How can we be hilarious when the imperilled souls of men, and our own too, rest as a burden upon us?" If the world were enveloped in one cast conflagration, should we naturally laugh and sing and dance our way through it? Yet a more fearful flame is ravaging it than that of the fires of Etna. A certain sobriety of deportment seems to such men becoming to life in such a world as this, and with such a future crowding on its destiny.

Christian ministers, whose work compels them to think much of these things, are apt to be so oppressed by them as to acquire a certain gravity of demeanour which the world laughs at. If you could look into their hearts, as you sometimes do in their memoirs, you would see that they bear the burden day and night of this *lost* world.

2. Christians of the broken heart, it must be confessed, are not apt to be popular with the world. Very hard things are said of them. Very unjust judgments they have to bear in silence. The world cracks many a jest upon their long faces and their "vinegar" aspect. I have seen tears trembling in their eyes, as their only answer to the gibes of men for whose souls they went home to pray.

Yet have not you heard from such jesters the fling at our common faith, "If I believed what you believe, I should move heaven and earth to save souls: it seems to me I could never laugh again"? So said an estimable woman of the world to me one day. It is hard to please men who do not feel the inner life which many humble Christians lead. Which shall we do, gentlemen and ladies, which shall we do?—hold on to, and try to act upon, the faith that gives us "long faces," or meet your charge of heartless inconsistency by living as if this were already a saved world, and our home were Eden?

3 The class of godly men and women of whom Jeremiah is the type possess a very profound style of Christian character. Not perfect, by any means. We all have an ideal of a certain robust and rounded Christian life superior to theirs. On the whole, St. Paul was a nobler character than Jeremiah. He ought to have been. He saw at its meridian the sun which the Prophet only foresaw long before the dawn. Yet it is unjust not to give the Jeremiahs of our brotherhood the credit for ploughing deep in their sense of eternal things. They may not be as happy as their faith in Christ warrants them to be. Yet they do make a beginning in the right direction. Theirs is a *struggle* to be and to do, of which they have no reason to be ashamed. They do not cover their eyes. They accept God's teachings courageously. Eternity will show to us all, that some of the world's *great souls* are among them. Multitudes who were more popular with their fellow-men here will there stand aside, and leave a clear space for those mourning ones to go up and hear God's message to them. Does anybody doubt what that will be?

4. Such Christians as the "weeping Prophet" represents are men and women of great spiritual power. The world does not like them, but cannot help respecting them. "I keep clear of unhappy people," said one of the impatient ones: yet I observed that he chose for his pastor, and honoured as a great man, one whose face was long, and whose look betokened secret tears. We love realities, after all. We feel the power of the man who knows the most of them, and feels them most profoundly. The man or woman who takes God's view of things, interprets human life as God interprets it, looks out on eternity as God reveals it, and whose visage bears the marks of inward struggles of soul with the facts of human destiny as God declares them, is a *power* with us all. If we come into deep waters, and the billows go over our heads, we look around gasping for the friendly word or look or hand of such to cheer us. The very men we have laughed at, or shrunk from, because they were "unco' guid men," are those whose experience we want then.

5. Who can help seeing that broken-hearted Christians are in some respects very nearly akin to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Does not their life, dropping its inconsistencies, strike us very much as His life does? He did not live a very hilarious life. Jest is not the chief thing we remember from his lips. His biographers do not say much of His "eyes sparkling with fun," and His "ringing laugh." He was never called a "capital fellow." Such clergymen as Matthew Byles and Sydney Smith, somehow, do not remind us very impressively of Him. He attended a wedding; but the chief thing He did there had more to do with eternity than with time, more to do with God than with man. Comic songs— But stop! Let us take off our shoes from our feet, for the ground whereon we stand is holy!

The sorrows of men had a strange attraction for Him. He did not "keep clear of unhappy men." The grave of Lazarus was the scene of one of the events most strikingly *like* Him. The way He felt about Jerusalem seems very much like that of the weeping Prophet. The nights He spent in prayer are a great comfort to these Christians of the broken heart. Of Gethsemane and Calvary what shall we say? May we reverently ask what class of Christians most nearly resemble Him there? What kind of disciples did He long to see around Him then? What is the meaning of that prophetic portrait of Him which painters have never copied, "His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men"?

6. Let us not be misunderstood. It is not that the example even of the "Man of Sorrows" forbids mirth, the laugh, the song, the jest. No: there is a time to laugh, and a time to dance. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee! Christ never by one word or look enjoined ascetic virtues. He lived so that bad men called Him a glutton. Men who prayed in the streets with one eye open called Him a wine-bibber. Men who cheated widows said He was a Sabbath-breaker. Adulterers charged Him with unseemly acquaintance with outcast women. Murderers and blasphemers called Him a devil. He was no saint according to the standard of such men. Nevertheless, the whole drift of His teachings and His life was towards a different *kind* of life from that which men call pleasure. Its joys lie deeper, and are built upon certain august and stern realities. And those realities it is which these Christians of the downcast-eye are struggling with, some of them, day by day, all their lives long.

7. These Christians of the broken heart are sure of a very exalted rank in Heaven. I hear a voice from beyond the stars, saying, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they

shall be filled. What are these that are arrayed in white robes? Whence came they? These are they that came out of great tribulation: *therefore* are they before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Jeremiah

BY RIGHT REV. G. E. L. COTTON, D.D.

"Then the word of the Lord came unto me," etc.—Jeremiah 1 4-6.

It is impossible that any one should understand the history of the Old Testament and the nature of that system of theocracy or Divine government which existed among the Jews, or appreciate God's personal and providential interference in their history, unless he has a clear conception of the mission and office of the Prophets. In that institution we see united the direct teaching and inspiration of God, with a regular system of human training and preparation for active work. When we read such a passage as the text, we might imagine that any man was selected at random, as it were, to be the medium of communicating God's will to man. Yet we know that Samuel and others instituted schools of the Prophets at Ramah, at Bethel, at Jericho, at Gilgal, wherein fit persons might be regularly trained and qualified for prophetic activity, and it is mentioned as a remarkable and almost singular exception that Amos was no Prophet, neither a Prophet's son (not educated, that is, in the Prophets' schools), but a herdsman and gatherer of sycamore fruit. Thus we see that in the Prophets were combined a divine and a human fitness for the work to which God called them: they were first regularly taught and prepared by earthly means, and also invested with their commission by God's direct inspiration. In the language of Scripture, the word of the Lord came to them and entrusted them with their message, which they then delivered, using no doubt all the aids which they had received from their education, from thought, and study, and earnest prayer, and a holy self-denying life. Moreover, we do wrong if we regard the Prophets solely or chiefly as predicting the future destinies either of God's chosen people or heathen nations. No doubt they were commissioned by God to foretell future events, an office which naturally arose out of their great and more important one of reforming and rebuking the people. For they were ordained to denounce God's vengeance on impenitent sinners; to declare that whole cities and nations would be removed from the face of the earth, if they persisted in oppression, in cruelty, in lust, in idolatry, or other sin; to console the small remnant of good men who remained faithful in the midst of surrounding wickedness, by the promise of God's continued protection, and of a brighter future when the Messiah, Whom the Jews confidently expected, the desire of all nations for Whom even the heathen darkly and uncertainly hoped, should lay the foundation of a more glorious Temple than that which crowned the hill of Zion, a wider Church than that which was confined by the mountains and rivers of Palestine. With certain exceptional cases, which it would be impossible to discuss here, this is the general scope and limit of the teaching of the Prophets in their character as readers of the future. Such teaching is plainly the subordinate, not the principal part of their office, which consisted in preaching righteousness, in rebuking sin, and in retaining the people in a communion with God so close and pure and tender, that the metaphors and comparisons which most fitly express it are derived from the care with which a husbandman prunes and plants and waters his vineyard, or the love which binds a mother to her newborn infant, or more commonly still from the holy union of the marriage tie. There are then two common errors in an uninstructed view of the prophetic office, which it is desirable that we should correct before we apply this particular case of Jeremiah to our own practical improvement. (1) They were not unconscious instruments in God's hand, but their own original character, and a peculiar training and education fitted them to receive His direct inspiration, and largely mingled with their own subsequent work: and (2) they were not merely employed, as the ministers of heathen oracles professed to be, to predict the future, but were preachers of righteousness, rebukers of sin, reformers of an ungodly age. If we do not disabuse ourselves of these mistakes, we shall plainly derive no religious good from contemplating the character and work of a Prophet. For if he is a mere instrument or mouthpiece in

the hands of the Spirit, or, again, if he is merely sent to anticipate history, not to reveal God's will to men and persuade them all to obey Him, then in either case his human character is so entirely lost and absorbed that he cannot be in any way a pattern to ourselves.

With these few observations, I would direct your attention to this first chapter of the prophecy of Jeremiah, presenting as it does a picture than which in the whole of the Old Testament there is scarcely anything more impressive, more touching, more instructive. I have taken as the text only the three most important verses of the chapter, but we shall have occasion to refer to almost all of it. We must understand the words "I am a child" almost or quite literally, for when the word of the Lord first came to Jeremiah, that is, when he was first made conscious of the work to which God bade him consecrate his life, we see from other evidence that he was very young. For this happened in the thirteenth year of king Josiah, about 630 B.C. Now he certainly was alive and in full prophetic activity at the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, of which the date commonly given is 587. But more than this, he continued to preach for some years after the Captivity, first in Judæa after it had become subject to the Chaldeans, then when removed into Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar's officers. There we lost sight of him: we know that even there he still continued to prophesy, but are not informed of the exact date of his death. But in any case he must have been a young man, perhaps even a boy, in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. Moreover, we learn, not only from the text but from the whole of his life and writings, that his character was gentle, soft, retiring; that he was sensitive and easily moved to sorrow, inclined to shrink from danger and publicity. Yet still he was chosen by God to do His work and proclaim His will in the midst of faithless prophets, and self-seeking priests, and violent kings and princes, and a corrupted and ungodly people. Often and often the burden which God had put upon him seems too heavy for him to bear. "Ah, Lord God!" he cries when he first learns that he is called to a life of active protest against evil, "Ah, Lord God! behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." And so when actually engaged in his work he seems to shrink from it. "Woe is me, my mother!" he says, in the fifteenth chapter, "that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed." And again, in the twentieth, "Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee, making him glad." He struggles between his natural timidity and an overwhelming sense of his duty to God. "O Lord," he once exclaims in heart-broken weariness, "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. . . Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." His feelings were those of the great Apostle to whom was committed a yet holier message: "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel. . . We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; . . for we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." Nor is it uninteresting to notice that a similar character has been conceived by our own great dramatist, when he puts these words into the mouth of one who is called to a task of awful responsibility:

The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!

But he has not ventured to complete the picture, nor to represent to us how such a call may be met, and such a burden endured: that is the lesson of Revelation alone. For Jeremiah, like St. Paul, was saved from despondency and from abandoning his work by the deep consciousness that a Divine Spirit was in him, that God's own arm was ever around him, by faith in God and in holiness, by an assured hope that he should never be forsaken, by love to the careless and disobedient children who were turning away from their Father's home. He fully and earnestly believed that "before God formed him in the belly, He knew him; and before he came forth from the womb, He had sanctified him and ordained him to be a Prophet unto the nations." And with this deep and abiding conviction, the boy of Anathoth went forth from his father's house in the tribe of Benjamin, the quiet home of a priest whose tranquil round of ordinary occupation was probably only interrupted by a visit to the Temple to serve in the order of his course, and stood in the streets of Jerusalem and the courts of the Lord's house,

and there opposed the vices of rich and poor alike, and braved the persecution of priests and princes, and the calumnies of faithless prophets; and there too he afterwards beheld with weeping eyes the smoking ruins of Jerusalem and the captivity of her blinded king, and the massacre of the royal line; and even after that overwhelming catastrophe he continued to preach righteousness among the wild hordes who were left to riot in the valleys of Judah; and again, when he stood an exile on the banks of the Nile, he never ceased to denounce idolatry and sin, and threatened Egypt itself with desolation.

We have seen that the class of men to which Jeremiah belonged were intended to be to the Jewish nations what all true and earnest Christians ought to be to the whole society in which they live. They were to be the leaven leavening the whole lump; the city set upon a hill; the salt of the earth; the light shining before men. They were to preach truth and holiness by their words, their actions, and their whole manner of feeling, thinking, and living. Neither youth nor any natural reluctance or gentleness of character could excuse any one of them from his work. Such shrinking from vigorous action would no doubt modify all that he did and said, it would soften with tenderness every severe rebuke, and penetrate his whole life with a thoughtful wisdom. But it would not prevent him from devoting all his powers and opportunities to improve and benefit those around him, and to imbue the general feeling of his friends and companions with a holy and religious spirit.

Jeremiah

BY REV. S. C. WILKS, M.A.

"The word of the Lord came unto me," etc.—Jeremiah xxxii. 6-8.

The commencement of the chapter presents to us the Prophet shut up in the court of the prison of the palace of Zedekiah, king of Judah. He had given great offence to his royal master, by declaring, as commanded by a divine revelation, that Jerusalem should be taken by the Chaldeans, and that Zedekiah and his people should be carried away captive into Babylon, as happened not long after, according to the word of the Lord by His servant. The enemy was at this very time before the gates; for the occurrence related in our text took place in the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, and it was in the ninth that the Chaldeans began the siege, and in the eleventh that they concluded it. At this time, therefore, the siege was at its height. The city had held out hitherto with desperate courage; but the enemy's devices of war were now in active advance, and famine and pestilence were assisting his efforts. The mounts were cast up, that is, mighty moving ramparts, offensive and defensive, overtopping the gates and walls, and from the towers of which the besiegers might hurl their weapons, or work their battering-engines, till the vanquished garrison should be obliged to retreat from their arduous post, and leave the city an easy and helpless prey to the assailants.

At this eventful moment, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, commanding him to purchase a field, the right of inheritance, and redemption of which, was vested in him. Without hesitation, he complied, and weighed out the purchase-money. He, moreover, went through all the legal formalities, subscribing the evidence of the purchase, sealing it, and taking witnesses, causing two copies to be made of the writings, one open, for common use and inspection; and the other sealed, for preservation in a place of safety, in case of the former being lost or injured.

Now to any person who witnessed Jeremiah's conduct without knowing the principle by which he was influenced, this transaction must have appeared most strange and unaccountable; for did it not seem like infatuation, that when the city was being besieged, when pestilence and famine were raging within its walls, and when the Prophet was actually in prison for predicting its downfall, and the carrying away of its inhabitants as slaves to a foreign land, he should purchase an inheritance, which, if he predicted truly, he was never likely to visit or enjoy? Besides, when the necessities of life were at a famine-price, and property was only valuable as it might procure bread, how unaccountable must it have appeared to the people, to see the Prophet purchasing a distant reversionary interest in the soil which was soon to become the spoil of war, at the sacrifice of a portable and available species of property, which might be easily concealed, and which was likely to be peculiarly valuable in a long and arduous

pilgrimage. And amidst the hardships and privations of a captive's doom, Jeremiah was never likely to taste of the fruits of the vineyard of Anathoth; nor had he a wife, or children, or children's children, to possess the inheritance after him. Indeed, so far removed from the common habits of mankind was his conduct, that if he had taken the title-deeds of his reversionary interest for sale among the merchants and exchangers of the besieged city, it is probable that he would have been laughed to scorn, and have found no purchaser. Amidst the alarm of sword, pestilence, and famine, and with the prospect of speedy exile to Babylon, of what value was a contingent interest in an estate in the country of Benjamin? The people must, therefore, either have believed that Jeremiah did not credit his own prophecy, and was only acting the part of an interested hypocrite, or that, if he was honest, he was labouring under some strange and inexplicable delusion.

And truly it had been so, if this had been all; but we find a key to the whole mystery, when we read: "The word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah; Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel!" Acting under this sanction, what had otherwise been infatuation, was faith; and this faith was not contrary to reason, but was in concurrence with its highest exertion. It was enough that God had commanded; it was the duty and the privilege of faith to obey.

This ready and implicit obedience was, however, peculiarly difficult, because the command was not immediately followed by any promise, or even explanation. God is usually pleased to connect injunctions, in the same sentence, as it were, with privileges; and, in reading His sacred Word, our feeble faith is often sustained by finding obedience set forth, not only as a bounden duty, but as a source of the highest blessedness. But to the command given to the Prophet Jeremiah, no explicit promise, or explanation, was, in the first instance, attached. He was simply directed to make the purchase, and he obeyed; it was not till afterwards, when he was commanded to take the writings to the public officer, to be deposited in an earthen vessel, where they might be kept in security, and continue many days, that we find it added, "for thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, houses, and lands, and vineyards, shall be possessed again in this land."

Yet even with this explanation and promise, there was much to try the faith of the Prophet. Though he had obeyed the command, and was apprized of the future restoration, yet still the transaction appeared to him extraordinary, and he might, perhaps, be tempted to think that in this season of exigency, when every other person was probably secreting his treasures, it was a severe injunction, that he, the servant of the Lord, should be commanded to sacrifice his little property for a reversion which he could never hope to enjoy; besides being scoffed at by the people as a hypocrite or an enthusiast. He, therefore, humbly prays, or rather seems to wish, that God would be pleased to unfold to him the intention of this perplexing command; not, however, with any view of evading it, for it was not till after the transaction had been completed, and was irrecoverable, that he uttered his petition; but, either for the strengthening of his own faith, or for the sake of others, who might ask for an explanation of his conduct. He might lawfully wish that his faith, though unreserved and implicit, should be accompanied by due intelligence; for, though we may not dispute the statutes and judgments of God, we may and ought to inquire, "What mean these statutes and judgments?" Jeremiah, therefore, says, "Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah";—not before: for true faith begins not with questioning, but submitting; it desires merely to know and to do the will of God; and Jeremiah had no wish to find in the explanation a pretext for avoiding this obligation; but now, having cheerfully obeyed, he pleads, as it were, with the Most High to instruct him as to the object of this mysterious direction. Thus Abraham, and many others, who had performed actions in simple faith, were afterwards enlightened respecting the meaning of the Divine purposes; and the declaration of our Lord to His disciple, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," often applies to the present world, as well as to that future world of enlarged knowledge, where the mysteries of Divine providence shall be more fully unveiled.

Jeremiah introduces his wish for an explanation, with a solemn acknowledgment of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God; not in the least impeaching any of His attributes, however mysterious might be the allotments of His providence. "Ah, Lord God! behold, Thou hast made the Heaven and the earth by Thy great power," etc. (Jer. xxxii. 24-27).

Thus Jeremiah appealed, as it were, to first principles; "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He had no doubt upon this point; his faith was not shaken in regard to the wisdom or justice of the Divine proceedings; but he was still at a loss to understand what especial lesson his all-wise Instructor intended to teach him by this particular transaction: and he therefore adds, in the language of doubt and inquiry, "Behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it," etc. (Jer. xxxii. 24-27).

It pleased God, having tried the faith of His servant, to explain the difficulty. "Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is there any thing too hard for Me?" The Almighty then proceeds to tell him that He would, as He had said, give the city into the hands of the Chaldeans, on account of the sins of the people, whom He had taught, rising up early, and teaching them, but who had not hearkened to His instruction, but had provoked the Most High to anger by their evil doings, so that their city should be burnt with fire, and they themselves carried away captive into the land of their enemies. But in the midst of judgment He would remember mercy; and His people having learned, by severe punishment, how fearful a thing it is to offend God, should be restored to their own land, and be again encompassed with blessings, and devote themselves to His service. "I will gather them out of all countries," etc. (Jer. xxxii. 37-44).

This explanation, doubtless, satisfied the mind of the Prophet. He saw what God intended to teach the people by the transaction; and though he himself would not survive after seventy years, to witness the return from the captivity, he could not but feel his heart gladdened by the joyful prospect. He had, indeed, made a present sacrifice; but, as a Prophet, it was specially his duty thus to act; as he did also on other occasions, viewing himself as appointed for a type or sign to the people, a medium of public instruction or warning, not opposing his will to that of God, but yielding obedience to every command, at whatever risk, or cost, or self-denial. And now he receives a pledge for his beloved country, not merely of temporal possessions, but of the favour of God, and spiritual blessings of infinitely greater value than anything earthly. He is favoured, as we have just seen, with a series of the most glowing promises, all being summed up in one emphatic declaration, "They shall be Thy people, and I will be their God."

Here, then, we have a striking illustration of the character of faith. It is acting in regard to our immortal souls, as Jeremiah did, in the purchase of the inheritance of Anathoth. It is so believing what God says, as to carry our belief into practice. More particularly, it has respect to the way of salvation, and the record which God has given us of His Son. For want of this faith, the Scriptures are, to many, but a dead letter. Men read in them that they are transgressors against their Creator, and that their sins justly deserve His displeasure and eternal condemnation. They are exhorted to flee from the wrath to come; to repent them of their evil doings, and to repair to the Cross of the Redeemer for pardon and peace, through His All-perfect atonement and sacrifice. They are commanded to be transformed in the spirit of their minds; to present their bodies and souls to God, as a reasonable sacrifice; and to live in faith and love, in humility and holiness, as those who are ransomed by the blood of Christ, and sanctified by His Holy Spirit. They are enjoined to set their affections upon things above and not upon things on the earth; to live as pilgrims and strangers here below, and to look for a future and enduring inheritance, instead of choosing as their portion the perishable vanities of a sinful world. But do the great majority of mankind thus live and act? Have they faith, like Jeremiah, to be willing to make a present sacrifice, if indeed it were worth the name of a sacrifice, as it is not, of those things which they promised in their baptism to renounce, for an unseen reversion in a future world? Are they desirous of obeying God and living to His glory? And if, by the scoffer at religion, the scheme of redemption through the blood of the Saviour be accounted a cunningly-devised fable; and if to be justified freely, in virtue of His merits through faith, be esteemed an unreasonable notion; and if to be practically His disciple, and to bear the reproach of His Cross in an ungodly world, be thought folly or mysticism; are they still willing, like Jeremiah, to obey God, at whatever apparent sacrifice, being consoled by the assured belief that what He commands is wise, and just, and good? Do the great majority of mankind, even of those who profess and call themselves Christians, thus live by faith? On the contrary, are not too many living practically without hope and without God in the world, preferring the trifles of the present moment to the concerns of their souls and of eternity? The people of Jerusalem

would doubtless have preferred the shekels of silver to a reversionary inheritance in the land of Benjamin; for the price paid was visible and tangible; the sacrifice required was present, and capable of easy estimation; but the promise was future and distant; and it required faith in God, and a full persuasion of His infinite wisdom and goodness, to reverse this first decision.

And thus it is in religion. Sin and temptation are ever present; the allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil, are constantly at hand to ensnare our souls; but the future world is not visible; even death, men flatter themselves, is far distant; and of judgment to come, they take little or no account. But faith opposes this fallacy. It invests the soul and eternity with pressing and powerful associations; it leads us to believe what God says, to fear what He threatens, and to desire what He promises. It supports the mind at the worst of times, causing it to repose upon the promises made to the true Israel of God, and looking forward to an abundant entrance into a far brighter and more glorious inheritance than the earthly Canaan.

Let us then pray that God would give us faith, if we have it not; and strengthen it, if we possess it. For it is His gift; and all its blessed fruits, also, are His. And let us strive to exercise it diligently. For what is there that the Christian may not implicitly consign to his God and Father in Christ Jesus? He commits his soul to Him as a faithful Creator, and may he not confidently intrust to Him all his other concerns; his character, his health, his worldly prospects, his beloved family, his friends, his country, and whatever else is dear to him? And this is the only source of true repose, in a changeful and jarring world. In God is rest and joy; let us then "acquaint ourselves with Him and be at peace."

The Rechabites

BY REV. M. BIGGS, M.A.

"Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever."—
Jeremiah xxxv. 19.

There cannot be imagined a more touching remonstrance than that which Jeremiah, in the chapter before us, addresses to the rebellious Jews. He assembles the heads of the Rechabites. These were a family of Kenites, a Midianitish tribe, who ever since the time of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had been attached to Israel, and to the worship of the Lord. These men had it in charge from Jonadab the son of Rechab, who lived in the time of Jehu, 270 years before, not to adopt any habits of luxury, nor to have fixed residences, but to lead a pastoral life: that while they partook of the privileges of God's people, they might not sink with them into corruption and license. This command of a remote ancestor, not distinguished, so far as we know, for splendid achievements, who had bequeathed no inheritance of fame or power to his posterity,—this command, preserved only by tradition, was scrupulously regarded by these children of the desert, men of the ready hand and the flashing eye. What a contrast between their obedience and Judah's rebellion! The Israelite had from his infancy known the righteous acts of the Lord to his fathers; the memorials and ceremonies of the temple service were a living witness of them. When from the heights of Sion or Carmel his eye ranged over the olive-yard, vineyard, cornfield, and pasture, how could he but own "The Lord hath brought us out of Egypt into this land, which floweth with milk and honey," and bow the knee with the surrender of the heart to the Holy One of Israel? But on the altars of Baal had those gifts of God been laid: and in spite of constant warnings by Prophets, by miracles and by judgments, still was seen the same stubbornness and idolatry; prince, priest, and people vieing in wickedness, drawing back from, and hardening the heart against the admonitions of the Lord. What force is there in the simple comparison "the commandments of Jonadab are performed, but My people hath not hearkened unto Me!" No marvel that such a contrast called down a terrible denunciation on the rebellious house. And this denunciation was rendered more firm and awful by the blessing of the faithful race. Jeremiah said, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me," *i.e.*, to worship Me, and to be My servant, "for ever." And we are told

by modern travellers that still in the parts of Asia remote from civilization, a tribe or tribes may be found, in whom this prediction is fulfilled.

Now let us see what teaching there is for us, in this benediction.

I. GOD BLESSED FILIAL PIETY, THE SPIRIT OF REVERENCE AND SUBMISSION, READINESS TO SUBMIT TO HUMAN RULE.

Jonadab the distant ancestor had bequeathed precepts sufficiently harsh and repulsive. Already bound to the law; and bending under a yoke, which one of the Apostles describes to have been scarcely tolerable; and which another affirms to have been designed for detection of sin, and the quickening of penitence; they were barred from enjoyments which the commandment did not forbid. This prohibition, the tribe for nearly 300 years unhesitatingly obeyed. And they have their reward. How much more reasonable is it, that we should yield due honour to our natural superiors, chiefly to our parents, and then to the king, and all that are in authority under him; to our teachers and spiritual pastors! For no less extensive a range than this must we give to the first commandment with promise.

The need of this cheerful obedience, the blessedness of this prompt submission and reverence, could at no time be enforced more appropriately than now, when we cannot but see that there is less of "an awful rule and right supremacy" awarded to age, to rank, to superiority of any kind, than was wont. The spirit of enquiry and independence very generally supersedes the rule of submission. I will not say, that the new spirit has not its advantages; doubtless it has many fascinations, but let us not close our eyes to its dangers. Safety and stability are great blessings; and these are made dependent on subordination. Reverence is the safeguard of faith. God has made the family life, the social order, the earnest, and the figure of His spiritual Kingdom. He has sanctified these as helps to realize His eternal dominion, and His parental character. He then who has lost his respect for age, and dignity, will not retain the knowledge of God. "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?"—and if a son feel no reverence for the father and mother, though he can remember their care, and has daily before him the spectacle of their virtues, how can the invisible Father inspire respect, and filial fear?

This was the law of the perfect life of Christ. The submission to His will was the world's redemption. His ears were opened to the Father's instructions; the tongue of the learner was given to Him Who "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He was subject to Joseph and Mary. "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered," and submitted to the ordinances of man for His Father's sake.

Let this example, these instances, sink into the minds of children, so soon as they can receive them. To obey their parents, and to speak the truth, are in general the most acceptable offerings of the infant heart devoted to God, the testimony of living faith. Let this example commend itself to children of maturer years. If at a certain period, a young man acquires a civil independence, the law of God, be it remembered, assigns no term to the reverence and submission to which the parent has claim. And parents should see the importance of training up their children in godly discipline; and so bearing themselves, that obedience may be easy, and the eye of the father welcomed, not feared. "Parents, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." And yet suffer not parental love to become a mere fond, selfish affection.

II. GOD PUTS HONOUR ON RIGOROUS SELF-DENIAL.

The Rechabites lived as strangers in the land of their adoption. In a time of luxury, they drank no wine, had no house, no field. In all the interchange of good offices, and the commerce of society, they mingled with the Israelites; but they were not conformed to their ways: and thus they were retained in faithfulness and integrity towards God. This, then, is an example to us, and enforces the Apostle's rule, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Not that the same abstinence is needful for us, which in their case was expedient; but the same spirit must at all times befit the followers of Him Who bore the Cross, not only as our surety, but as our example also. We must recall the prayer of our Lord (John xvii. 15): in which a caution is implied. We are not to go out of the world, but, which is a much harder thing, by constant self-examination, by meditation, by prayer, and holy communion, to keep from the evil which mingles even with allowable gratification. "They that have wives should be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that

buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it." To be carnally minded is the death of the soul. To love the world is to lose the love of God. We must then be heavenly, while on earth; spiritual, though in the body. May we keep constantly before us our great business here; consider the vanity of the creature; feel the eye of our Maker upon us; seek to be as our Master Christ; and strive, by keeping a pure conscience, and by earnest prayer to the Spirit of truth, for "a right judgment in all things."

This true and habitual religion will preserve us in integrity, and bring on us the blessing of the Rechabites, the approval of our God, and a place of standing with assurance before Him for ever.

III. CONSIDER THE NECESSITY LAID UPON US OF OBEYING THE LORD.

The scene presented to us—the condemnation of Judah—the blessing of the Rechabites, should lay hold on us, for whom greater things have been done. "Be followers of God, as dear children." How easy is Christ's yoke, and His burden! How manifold, abundant, and prevailing His gifts of grace, the power working in you, whereof you may all avail yourselves! Think, therefore, how many witnesses you provoke against yourselves, if you neglect so great salvation; if, bought with the price of Christ's blood, you make His members the instruments of iniquity and excess; if, made inheritors of Heaven, you seek your rest on earth. Not only will the Ninevites, who repented at the preaching of a Prophet, whom they might, with some show of reason, have despised and rejected, condemn you—not only will she condemn you, who came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon—you will be condemned also by these Rechabites, who justified and followed the stern rule of their ancestor, keeping to a hard life in a dissolute age—by all, who with earnest zeal, though imperfect knowledge, have given their bodies to torture and laceration, and, exhausted by long pilgrimage, left their bones to bleach in the desert. Tyre and Sidon will say, "had Jesus Christ been set forth, crucified among us, we should have repented." The sons and daughters of Sodom will say, "had we beheld the light of salvation, which streamed in upon you, we would have cast aside the works of darkness"; the very Jews, who were condemned by the Rechabites, will fare better than you, for their yoke was a yoke of bondage, the Saviour not yet known, the Spirit not yet poured out. "See, then, that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven."

Resolve, then, my friends, once for all, that you will have your part with those who are cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus, and led into holiness by the Spirit of the living God. Whatever you may be in outward circumstances, whatever you may have been in life and character, God will not refuse the free offering of your hearts. He will cleanse and renew and sanctify them, and make them temples, meet for His own indwelling.

The Rechabites

BY REV. JULIUS LLOYD, M.A.

"They said, We will drink no wine," etc.—Jeremiah xxxv. 6.

The story of the Rechabites is both interesting and instructive. They were a pious tribe of Arabs, living in tents, and holding to the ancient customs of their fathers. By descent they were sprung from the Kenites, who befriended the Children of Israel in their journey through the wilderness and afterwards. They made their home in the land of Israel, and worshipped the Lord God of Israel. Nevertheless they dwelt apart, among their flocks and herds, tilling no field, planting nothing, sowing nothing, and religiously abstaining from wine, in accordance with the precepts of their famous ancestor Jonadab, the ally of King Jehu. Jonadab seems to have regarded with a prudent fear the corruption of morals in Jewish cities, and taught his children to cherish the simple patriarchal manners of their ancestors.

So they did for nearly three hundred years after Jonadab, until the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. In the terror caused by that great destroyer, the Rechabites fled from their pastures, and took refuge within the walls of Jerusalem. Here they were

found by the Prophet Jeremiah, who drew from their example a lesson of warning to the Jews. He offered them wine, which they refused, because it had been forbidden by their father : whereupon he took up his prophetic discourse, and pointed the contrast between the obedience of the Rechabites to their father's commandment, and the disobedience of the Jewish nation to the commandment of God. He concluded by predicting evil to Judah and blessing to the Rechabites. "Jonadab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever." His words were fulfilled by the adoption of the Rechabites to serve with the Levites in the Lord's House. To this day there are tribes in Arabia, who claim to be descended from Jonadab, the son of Rechab, and who keep his precepts.

1. It is their filial obedience on which the Prophet lays stress. They held in reverence the sayings of their father with a childlike simplicity, because of the veneration which they felt for him. Jeremiah's blessing on them is a personal application of the promise of the Fifth Commandment. They honoured their father, and their days were prolonged in the land. This promise of length of days is fulfilled in nations, even more than in individuals. Nothing contributes more surely to the lasting welfare of a State than a habit of reverence in the people for law, which is in fact what has been laid down by custom or authority in time past. We have this illustrated by the histories of Greece and Rome, if we compare the two. The short-lived existence of the Greek republics is a remarkable contrast to the enduring strength of the Roman republic; and the most obvious explanation of the contrast is, that the Romans held in honour the laws of their forefathers, and the Greeks did not. It has been hitherto a part of our national character to respect authority, precedent, and custom, even in the changes which are made from time to time; and I doubt not that our national blessings depend in great measure on our doing so. The falling off in habits of respect for parents, and for authority of every kind, which we cannot but observe of late years, is a bad sign for the future.

2. It is right to inquire how far the particular rule which the Rechabites obeyed is commended for its own sake. And here we find that God's law leaves every man at liberty, to the direction of his own conscience. Jeremiah does not say a word in praise of the Rechabites, except with reference to their father's command; and the point of their obedience would be less emphatic if it had not been shown in an indifferent matter, in which they were at liberty to disobey. What is commended in them is their loving and willing obedience, in a case where they might have acted otherwise without breach of a moral law. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that we are free to live after the manner of the Rechabites, as John the Baptist did in regard to abstinence; or to dwell in cities and drink wine, as He Himself did. In fact Christ did much more, for He in some measure reversed the rule of the Rechabites. He built houses in following His foster-father's trade, in accordance with the same principle of filial duty. He not only drank of the fruit of the vine, but provided it miraculously, on one occasion, and hallowed it by His sacramental ordinance at the Last Supper.

3. We come now to the vital question, What is the rule which we are called to obey, as children of a Heavenly Father? That rule is expressed in the well-known two Commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets, enjoining on us the love of God and the love of our neighbour. It is a rule which, in its full extent, covers the entire field of our duty in every relation of life. But the application of this golden rule, which properly belongs to the subject which we have now before us, is much more limited. We may well confine our attention for a little while to the particular class of duties which correspond most nearly to the precepts of Jonadab the son of Rechab.

Temperance in the true and large sense of a habit of self-control, was a virtue in the estimation of the ancients; and it is also a virtue in the Kingdom of Christ. As a Christian duty, temperance rests on two grounds. First, as redeemed by Christ and bound in love to our Heavenly Father, love to God requires us to keep our bodies in the condition which is most favourable to His service. A Christian is called in duty to take care of his body as a horse-soldier takes care of his horse, that it may not fail him when wanted for action. In this respect temperance means neither more nor less than a wise care for health, refraining from excess of every kind, and from that extreme neglect which is as bad in its consequences as any other excess. If we look upon our powers of body and mind, as committed to us by God, to be spent as talents in His service, we shall neither squander them nor hoard them, but use them wisely, and this practical wisdom is temperance. It is a perversion of the word for a man to call himself temperate, when he abstains utterly from certain pleasures to indulge himself wantonly in certain others; when, for instance, he drinks no wine or fermented spirit, but eats gluttonously, or gives

way to a fanatical spirit which judges of all men by the exciseman's test, ignoring all religious and political differences, in comparison of the difference between those who abstain from wine and those who do not, and seeking to put compulsion on those who are not to be persuaded. This is not temperance, but essentially intemperance, however good the cause may be.

Let us not, however, forget that we have a duty to our neighbour in this matter. The rules which are dictated by a right care of our own health are a part of our duty, but not the whole. Our bodies are to our souls, according to the comparison which I used just now, as the horse of a horse-soldier. There is a similar obligation to take good care of the health and condition of the animal; and all for a similar purpose, which may at any time require the sacrifice of health, or of life itself. As a soldier in the King's service risks his charger in the battle, or gallops him to death on urgent occasion, so a Christian soldier has to use his bodily health, not as may seem best for his personal advantage, but as may be required in his Lord's service. It may happen, therefore, that a man will deny himself lawful, and even wholesome indulgences, for the benefit of others, who are likely to be led by his example. And such self-denial is not confined to cases of abstinence: it may be shown in opposite ways. Many a clergyman has thrown himself into general and even festive society, as Francis Xavier did, in order to win souls to Christ. Wisdom is justified of all her children, whereas the foolish make a mock not only at sin, but at the virtue which they do not understand.

Our calling in Christ is far higher than a calling to obey any single precept or precepts. We are called to give to Him the more difficult service of an intelligent self-devotion; a service more difficult, both as requiring the vigilant exercise of our mind and will, and also as leaving us exposed to temptations against which a narrower rule of obedience guards once for all. But in proportion as Christian duty is difficult, its motives are high. These poor Arabs of the house of Rechab, cherishing reverently the traditions of a sire long since deceased, cry shame upon our negligence of the Word of the Living God, the Father of the spirits of all flesh. We may also draw a similar lesson from the Rechabites of our own day, the abstainers who, in fidelity to a pledge of brotherhood, refuse the fruit of the vine. Granted that their virtue is based on human authority, have we so relied on Divine authority as to choose a more excellent way?

The sum of the matter is set forth in a precept of St. Paul with regard to eating meat, which is applicable no less to the case of drinking. He says, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth": "He that eateth, eateth unto the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks." Thus on both sides charity should prevail; but especially it is due on the part of those who indulge themselves, towards those who deny themselves. If we use the gifts of God moderately and thankfully, let us not disdain but honour the resolution of those who shun what they know to be a snare; and still more let us honour those, who abridge their own liberty to set an example to weaker brethren.

The Rechabites

BY REV. R. W. BURTON, M.A.

"The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab," etc.—Jeremiah xxxv. 14.

The Rechabites were descended from the Kenites, to which people Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses belonged. This individual, we find, came out to Moses, as he was leading the Israelites through the wilderness, for the purpose of bringing his wife to the Jewish leader. Being received by Moses with the courtesy and respect due to the relationship that existed between them; and moreover, being instructed in the wonders God had wrought for His people's deliverance out of Egypt, Jethro was led to acknowledge the Lord, and to offer a burnt-offering and sacrifices, while Aaron and all the elders of Israel ate bread with him before the Lord. We then immediately find him giving that remarkable counsel to his son-in-law in reference to the appointment of those under-rulers and advisers who formed, or at least were the origin of, the Sanhedrin, or great council of the Jewish nation. After this Jethro returned to his own land; but we have reason to believe only for the purpose of bidding it farewell, and

bringing his family back with him in the way to Canaan, in this yielding to the beautiful invitation of Moses, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you : come thou with us, and we will do thee good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

Among the Kenites there was one celebrated person, by name Rechab, who may be supposed to have occupied the position which the Sheik holds at the head of a tribe, and his followers assumed the name of Rechabites. These then are the people introduced so unexpectedly, and yet with so much effect, in the chapter before us, in which two leading subjects are presented to our notice. One, the blessing attending the Rechabites' obedience to their earthly father ; the other, the condemnation of the disobedience of the Israelites to their God.

These Rechabites are not introduced by the Prophet merely for the purpose of contrasting their conduct with that of the Israelites. This certainly is the main object—the scope of the chapter evidently leads to this ; but there was that which was positively good and worthy of commendation in itself in the conduct of these people. The question is in what did this consist ? It consisted in a full and uncompromising obedience to their ancestor's command. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab, your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you ; therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever." Almighty God here declares that the posterity of Jonadab should not perish, but should have a place in the Church of God, and an admission to the same privileges as belonged to the Jewish people. Accordingly, they were sharers indeed in their exile, but also in their restoration ; and in that final recovery to be vouchsafed to the Jew, the Rechabite is not to be left out. And it is an interesting fact, that more than one modern traveller in the East speaks of having met with members of an extensive tribe who trace their genealogy from Rechab, and live after the same manner with that singular people.

And now we turn to the strongly-marked contrast of the conduct of the Rechabites with that of Israel. The obedience of the one to an earthly father, set against the other's disobedience to her God.

"The words of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed : for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment : notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking ; but ye hearkened not unto Me." In this language Almighty God conveys a strong reproof to His people. There was no religious duty involved in abstinence from wine or disuse of houses and lands. The possession and use of these were perfectly lawful in themselves. But it appeared to Jonadab that they might militate against the temporal welfare of his descendants. They would be exposed to the jealousy of the people among whom they had come to dwell. They would be liable to be carried captive, as the event proved, by a hostile power. Jonadab then laid a political injunction, not a religious one, on his children ; and yet the word of an earthly parent solicitous for his children's earthly good had influence and weight, where the commandment of God, which involved every thing that can be imagined of power to bind the conscience, was set at nought by His rebellious children.

The Lord reminds Israel again that the Rechabites were obedient to a command of three hundred years' existence (for so long a period had elapsed since Jonadab gave it). Whereas He, not once, not three hundred years ago, but assiduously and constantly had spoken unto His people. And so this continual call upon their attention took away every thing like excuse for their sin, which otherwise, on the ground of ignorance or forgetfulness might have been pleaded.

Then again, let them contrast the nature of the commandments laid respectively on the Rechabites and themselves. On the former were imposed hard and severe restrictions, presenting peculiar difficulties, involving present inconvenience and discomfort, calculated to render those who obeyed objects of ridicule and contempt ; whereas to the latter, nothing was forbidden, save what was opposed to their happiness and enjoyment, and linked with the commandment was a direct promise of temporal prosperity, for this was the burthen of God's message by His servants, "Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers."

Here was another chord touched. Were they not here reminded of past mercies, and

was not their ingratitude here rebuked? But the moderation and justice of God's requirements were of no avail, while the hard, though perhaps prudent, injunctions of the son of Rechab prevailed and were submitted to.

Ungrateful, unreasonable, undutiful, as was the conduct of Israel towards their God, it finds, alas! its parallel in many a succeeding age, and the descendants of Jonadab may rise up in judgment against the men of this generation and condemn it, for they hearkened unto and obeyed the son of Rechab, and behold a greater than Jonadab is here.

My brethren, this Scripture story is recorded for our instruction. It is one of the few chapters in this Prophet which our Church has singled out for its Sunday Lessons. Let us not content ourselves in scanning with a curious eye, a somewhat singular record of ancient manners; but let us gather up the practical instruction with which it is richly fraught. Let us be provoked by these Rechabites to love and to good works. Let my younger hearers be led by the example before us to venerate with deeper feelings a parent's wishes and a parent's commands. There may be apparently hardness or difficulty in the requirements they lay upon you, but even as in the case of the Rechabites, you may live to see the prudence which dictated them. It might have appeared hard to the sons of Jonadab, that they should be debarred from what others enjoyed; but the event proved, no doubt, that it was for their best interests. They were free from much of the toil and anxiety that wait upon the acquirement of worldly possessions; they were the more welcome among the people with whom they took up their abode, from their evident freedom from ambition; no jealous eye rested on their frugal stores, supplied by the produce of their flocks.

When Nebuchadrezzar's hosts drew near, they found little difficulty in withdrawing themselves and taking up their residence (*then* not opposed to the spirit of their father's injunction) in Jerusalem, and finally, when carried captive to Babylon with the people of their adoption, they had the less to deplore—the empty traveller is at ease in the presence of the robber.

But, my young friends, be it so—that no benefits directly follow in the line of your obedience—that obedience will prove its own reward, while it has the express promise of a blessing from on high. There is but one limitation to the obedience of a child to his earthly parent, and that is, when, unhappily, such obedience would clash with duty to God. There the higher Master, the Heavenly Father, must have precedence. "Children, obey your parents," but only "in the Lord." Had the commandment of Jonadab been opposed to his descendants' higher duty, instead of the broad seal of Heaven's approbation of their conduct, condemnation would have rested upon them. The things commanded were indifferent, as regarded their duty to God; men were free to use or not to use them; obedience to Jonadab involved not any reproach to disobedience as regarded Him "Whose we are, and Whom we ought to serve."

But if the portion of Scripture before us reads this lesson of filial obedience, much more does it speak home to us on the subject to which the chapter is mainly directed, namely, obedience to the Almighty God. To this gratitude for past mercies prompts—reason, rightly directed, points to it—duty makes it incumbent—the promises attached to it make it our interest. And yet, obedience to Almighty God is not exemplified by the mass of professing believers; and in that description, professed believers, not actual ones, the cause of this disobedience is wrapped up.

Now, there must be motive to action or there will be no movement; and for this movement of which we speak, there is required a high and lofty impulse—a power, in short, which is no less than that of the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and of the fear of the Lord. Such as our principles are, such will our life and conduct be. Water will not rise above its own level. Let in the Atlantic on your shore—the lake it forms will rise no higher than the surface of the ocean beyond. There are motives which will carry one well through the present life and gain the world's approval, for "if thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak well of thee"; but to carry one into a higher walk, where he may have a higher aim and end in view, he must be possessed of a higher principle. If we would present the obedience of faith, we must be possessed of the principle of faith. And when I speak of faith, I mean that which has for its object the atonement of the Son of God. *There* is the centre and the spring of all obedience that is valuable in God's sight. And while I would ever turn your thoughts to that only Sacrifice for sin, and, consequently, the only ground for a sinner's hope, I would exhort you to test the reality of your trust therein. If your trust for acceptance with God, and justification before Him, be placed in the Redeemer, then prove it, by manifesting what is wrapped up in the

principle of the Gospel you profess; and that principle is, that obedience is so requisite in God's sight, that though Jesus "was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

You have this point of Christian obedience clearly stated and enforced, as elsewhere, so particularly in Romans vi.—a portion of Scripture which so fully sets forth the doctrine of justification by faith only. The whole chapter should be read and weighed in connection with what has been said. The motive or principle of obedience is there; but does it not shine as a sunbeam through *all* of the Word of God? May that portion of it I have dwelt upon to-day throw its share of light upon your minds. In it we see exemplified the position I have laid down—that in order to obedience there must be faith working by love. The Rechabites would not have continued their long course of obedience had not their original *trust* in Jonadab's wisdom, combined with filial respect and *affection*, laid the foundation of a habit which grew with their growth, and strengthened with their strength. Let but similar principles and motives actuate us in reference to our Heavenly Father, and we shall esteem His service perfect freedom; and that in keeping His commandments there is great reward. But if we attempt a compromise, and offer, instead of obedience, even the most costly gifts, then we shall hear Him address us as the King of Israel was addressed of old by the Prophet—"Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Baruch—I.

BY REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

"Now the king sat in the winterhouse," etc.—Jeremiah xxxvi. 22, 23, 32.

In the long fierce conflict between Egypt and Babylon the kingdom of Judah, which lay between the two, suffered often and much. Obligated to take the part of one of the combatants, it offended both by allying itself now with the one, and now with the other. From the first the Jewish Prophets recognized in Nebuchadnezzar "the servant" and "the rod" of Jehovah, and protested therefore against any alliance with Egypt, the hereditary foe of Israel. But her kings and statesmen were neither so wise as her Prophets, nor would they learn wisdom from the Prophets. As a rule they leaned toward Egypt, though they were often compelled to submit to Babylon. And Jehoiakim—whose brief reign was the turning-point in the struggle between these two vast empires, and indeed in the history of the ancient East—was no wiser than his predecessors, was, indeed, much less wise than his father, the pious Josiah. Against the advice of his ablest statesman, as well as in defiance of the warnings of Jeremiah the Prophet, he had allied himself with Pharaoh-Necho, the despot of Egypt. Once already the penalty of his folly and sin had been exacted of him. Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to Jerusalem, taken and plundered it, and made Jehoiakim his vassal; and yet on the whole, and for the time, had dealt leniently with him, having then no other cause of quarrel with him than his alliance with Egypt.

But Jehoiakim was not the man to learn wisdom even from experience. Selfish and sensual, cowardly yet obstinate, he resented the humiliation he had brought on himself, and still inclined to Egypt, still rejected the warnings of the Prophet and the advice of his most sagacious councillors. While his throne was tottering to its fall, he multiplied the burdens imposed on his people, and exacted forced labour from them, that he might build himself palace after palace: and, with that fatal insensibility to the omens of the time, or that fatal incapacity of averting them, which we ourselves have witnessed in the Sultans of Turkey and the Khedives of Egypt, thought of little but exerting the capricious self-will, exacting the homage, and surrounding himself with the luxuries so dear to the heart of an Oriental despot.

In the fourth year of his reign God, by His servant Jeremiah, made a final effort to open his eyes, or to save the people whom he oppressed from the fate which threatened them. The Prophet was "shut up"—in some way hindered from visiting either the palace or the temple; not imprisoned, it would seem, but banished, perhaps, from the precincts of the Court by a decree of the King, who both hated and feared him. Hence, by the command of Jehovah, he calls to him a disciple named Baruch, who seems to have

been his "minister" and destined successor, just as Elisha was the "minister" of Elijah, and, for a time, Gehazi that of Elisha. He bids Baruch write in a book, or on "a roll"—*i.e.*, on several skins sewn together and capable of being folded on a roller—"all the words of the Lord" which Jeremiah had spoken. That is to say, Baruch was to write down, at Jeremiah's dictation, either a concise summary of all the Prophet's utterances, or, more probably, all the words in which he had warned the King against entangling himself with Egypt and opposing the Babylonian power.

That the intention of these Divine warnings and threats was a most merciful one, we learn from verse 3, in which Jehovah is represented as saying: "It may be that the house of Judah will hearken to all the evil which I purpose to do unto them, *that they may return every one from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin*"; and again in verse 7, where Jeremiah says to Baruch, "It may be that they will present their supplication before the Lord, *and will return every one from his evil way*; for great is the anger and the fury which the Lord hath pronounced against His people."

After he had written down the words of the Prophet, Baruch was to wait for a public fast before he read them in the ears of all the people. He was to wait, both because on a public fast day the people from the adjacent country and villages, as well as from Jerusalem, flocked to the temple, till its courts were crowded with worshippers; and because, coming at such a time with hearts attuned to penitence, they would be the more likely to listen to the Divine rebuke.

At last a fast was proclaimed for the ninth month, *i.e.*, some time in December; and as none of the stated Jewish fasts fall in that month, it is probable that the date was chosen either for a penitential commemoration of the capture of Jerusalem at this time in the previous year, or because tidings had arrived that Nebuchadnezzar was once more approaching the Holy City. For the Prophet's purpose, therefore, the time was happily chosen, since with the memory of so great a calamity in their minds, and with the prospect of a calamity still more terrible immediately before them, the people would surely be disposed to listen to words that came straight from Heaven and contained both a warning and a promise exactly suited to their needs.

At the risk of his life Baruch purchases and seizes the opportunity. Nor does he seem to have lacked friends and helpers among the most able and influential servants of the King. For Gemariah "the scribe," in whose chamber he read all the words of the book, was the public scribe, *i.e.*, the secretary of the State; a man of noble birth; a good man, like his father before and his son after him; one of the most trusted and sagacious ministers of the King. His chamber was over the thick massive New Gate, which led up from the outer to the inner court of the temple, from the court of the worshippers to that of the priests. It had windows which "gave" on both these courts. And, standing at the window that overlooked the outer court, Baruch would have a rare point of vantage from which to deliver the words of the Prophet in the ears of all the people; while his words would gather force from the implied sanction of the trusted and popular statesman in whose chamber he stood.

Gemariah, however, did not stand beside him, for he was occupied in the service of the State—attending a sort of Cabinet meeting in the adjoining Chancery—as we learn from verse 12; but his son was there to represent him: and no sooner had Baruch read the words and closed the book than Michaiah, the son of Gemariah, hastened to report what he had heard to the assembled ministers. So important do they deem his tidings that they despatch an official to bring Baruch and his book before them. When he arrives, they courteously entreat him to read his book to them, that they may hear his very words. As he reads, they are filled with consternation; "they trembled one to another," we are told: they accepted his threatnings of evil, *i.e.*, as a message from God; they were genuinely alarmed, and betrayed their alarm to each other by troubled gestures and glances.

The event is of such moment that they "*must* tell the king" of it. Hence they wish to acquaint themselves accurately with the facts of the case, to learn how far Jeremiah is responsible for these words, and how far Baruch. In answer to their question, "Tell us, now, how were these words written down?" Baruch replies with much simplicity: "He dictated all these words to me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book." However the book was written, they knew only too well how the king was likely to take it. And hence, to save the book, if that be possible, they deposit it with the keeper of the public rolls; and, to save its authors, they bid both Baruch and Jeremiah, go hide

themselves, and let no man know where they be,—which they forthwith did so effectually that even a prince, with the royal warrant in his hand, could not discover them; so effectually that, to their grateful hearts, it seemed that the Lord Himself had hidden them.

When the king receives the report of his ministers he is sitting (the month is December) in "the winter-house," or apartment, *i.e.*, in the southern wing of his palace which had the warmest frontage, with a fire burning in a brazier before him. He is so enraged and alarmed by their report that he insists on seeing and hearing for himself the book which Baruch had written. One of his servants, Jehudi, is sent to fetch the book, and begins to read it; but no sooner has he read three or four columns than the incensed tyrant snatches it from his hand, slashes it into strips with the scribe's knife—the knife used to make and mend the reeds used for writing—and casts the strips into the brazier before him, till the whole roll is consumed in the flames:—*as if he could alter the fact by destroying the record or forecast of the fact!* The good Gemariah, and two of his faithful colleagues, withstand the foolish monarch to his face, and implore him not to destroy the truest and noblest utterance of his reign. Reading between the lines of the story, indeed, I think we can see that all his experienced ministers, all the statesmen who had been trained to their work under Josiah his father, disapproved of his policy as well as of his impotent and undignified anger; but that his courtiers, the men who lived by flattering his despotic humours, were untouched by the Prophet's moving and threatening words; for *they* "were not afraid, nor rent their garments." Yet there was much in his words to inspire awe and fear, as there was also to account for the angry outburst of the king; for the burden of the prophetic message was: "Thus saith the Lord, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence both man and beast." But when did a despot believe truths in which he did not wish to believe? or when were his courtiers convinced that their reign was fast hastening to a close? To meet unwelcome truths with mere violence and rage, to assume that facts might be blown out of their natural shape, or detached from their inevitable consequences, by their foul and insolent breath, has been their way ever since the world began.

Not content with having destroyed the book, Jehoiakim and his minions set themselves to destroy the Prophet who had brought them the message from God, and the scribe who had written it down. And with what result? With the result which commonly follows when men meet truth with mere bluster and violence. Jeremiah took another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, who wrote therein all the words of the book which the king had destroyed; "*and there were added besides unto them many like words.*" Not only was the book reproduced; it was also amplified and enlarged. Nay, even before it was replaced by an ampler volume, the madness of the king and the impenitence of the people were rebuked by an immediate sentence more pungent and severe than any they had yet heard: "Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; he shall have none to sit upon the throne of David," etc.

It is a strange story; and no one who is at all familiar with the manners and customs of the East can miss the touches of local colour with which it abounds. And yet, at bottom, it is a story familiar to us all: no one need travel to the East to find a thousand illustrations of it. Magnify the penknife into a sword and the brazier into a pile of faggots, and you will see at once that Jehoiakim did but set an example which all the world has followed, and, alas, all the Church also; that he simply opposed the facts and truths he did not like in the very way in which they have always opposed them. Books have been burned, and men have been burned, for the truths they taught. Always, however, with the same result: the books have been re-written, "with many like words" added unto them; and the men, being dead, have spoken with a more vital and persuasive tongue, and have been succeeded by others, who have carried on their work to issues which even *they* did not foresee.

But most of *us* have played a very small and subordinate part in this great warfare. And if we would take home the warning of this story, if we would either convict ourselves of breathing, or be on our guard against breathing, the spirit of Jehoiakim, we must mark how in other, if not in lesser, ways we may oppose ourselves to the facts of life, to the laws by which the world is governed, to the truths which are ever seeking an entrance into our hearts. Every wilful despotic humour we cherish impairs our openness and veracity of mind, whatever the form it may take, in whatever province it may work.

For example, a woman conceives a prejudice against one of her neighbours, wilfully cherishes a dislike to him on no better ground, perhaps, than that he is too wise to flatter her vanity, too kind to approve her faults of temper and conduct. She hears much good of him, sees much in him that is good; but she will not believe either her own eyes or other people's tongues. She flatters herself that she can alter the facts of his life by refusing to believe them, by censuring and misreporting them. With a tongue sharper than any knife she stabs at his character, slashes the fair record of his deeds, pursues him with slanders and invectives which in her heart she herself knows or partly knows to be untrue, and proves that, were it in her power, she would treat him as she treats his reputation. Have you never met, or read of, such a woman as this? Have you never felt that such an one may do the man she hates much mischief for a time, but that in the end she does herself a far worse mischief? Have you never seen his character come out all the fairer for the ordeal through which it has passed, while all her slanders recoil on her own head, react on her own nature, make her worse than she was, and lead her neighbours to think her even worse than she is?

Or, again, a man devotes himself to politics in an ignorant, prejudiced, and reckless spirit. He can see nothing good in those who differ from him, persuades himself and attempts to persuade others that nothing can prosper in their hands, refuses to give them credit even when they deserve credit, and invents impure and corrupt motives for any undeniable good they do. The facts may be against him, and the public record of facts. If they are, he will contradict them, or twist them out of their natural shape. He misrepresents them in every speech he makes. He charges men whom he knows to be wiser than himself with ignorance, men whom he knows to be abler than himself with incompetence, men whom he knows to be braver than himself with cowardice, men who have done far more for their country than he can do with want of patriotism, or even, in the madness of party strife, calls men whose slightest notice he would count an honour, "rogues and sluggards, steeped in blood." And with what result? Simply with this, that he degrades his own nature, lowers his own reputation, injures his own cause; while those whom he has defamed, when once the light of truth breaks through the clouds, are the more honoured and trusted by all sensible men: for facts are not to be licked out of shape by lying tongues, and truths remain true let who will deny them.

Let no man's heart fail him, then, if he have any truth to teach, any message from Heaven to deliver. Jehoiakim's knife and brazier have not much that they can do against him, and even what they are permitted to do against him may prove to be for him. His book may be cut up. He himself may be put to a fiery trial. But the trial will but purify and strengthen him; and his book will be re-written, perchance, by some abler scribe, with "many like words added unto it": for truth *is* great, and *must* prevail.

Baruch—II.

BY REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

*"The word that Jeremiah the Prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah," etc.—
Jeremiah xlv. 1-5.*

Young, ardent, the scion of a noble family which had long been accustomed to political office, the favourite disciple of Jeremiah, his "minister" apparently and destined successor, it was but natural that Baruch should cherish a lofty ambition, and hope to play a great part in public life. Nor does it follow, though his ambition is here rebuked, that it was a wholly ungenerous ambition, a mere desire for political office and advancement. He may have aimed, he probably did aim, at playing a part as beneficent as great. His ruling desire seems to have been to fit himself for the rôle of statesman-prophet, to receive an inspiration from Heaven which would rank him among the "seers" of Israel, not simply that he might quicken wonder and admiration by foretelling things to come, but also that he might so read the omens of the time as to know what the will of the Lord was, and so interpret and enforce them as to further the best interests of his race. Nevertheless he *did* crave personal distinction—great things for himself, as well as public usefulness. While he was fain to serve the State and to contribute to

the national welfare, he wished to serve it on a grand scale, and in a way that would fix attention on himself, on his public virtues, his eminent gifts. And this was "the little rift within the lute" which, unless it were closed, would let its music out.

It was a grave disappointment to him to find Jeremiah setting himself against the strongest currents of popular and royal opinion in so uncompromising a spirit. Not, probably, that he would have had the Prophet unfaithful to the Divine message which burned within his heart. But there are many ways of delivering a message; and surely it would have been possible for Jeremiah to have ingratiated himself with the king and his courtiers, or to have gradually formed a party of his own among the statesmen of the time, many of whom were well-affected towards him; and then to have insinuated and suggested the truth by slow degrees and in indirect ways, instead of abruptly breaking on the Court or the crowd with stern denunciations of the policy which they favoured or approved. He was standing in his own light. He was throwing away his influence, and all chance of rising to eminence and distinction. He was compelling opposition and defeat by the harshness of his method, the fierceness of his spirit. He would gain nothing by it, even for his message; but lose all.

That it was only the method of Jeremiah which Baruch questioned, not his fidelity; that he was moved simply by the astonishing but unconscious arrogance which often leads the young and inexperienced to deem themselves wiser than their fathers, and to assume that *they* could have done a difficult work in a more effective way, is plain, I think, from the story of Baruch's book. Conceited and ambitious as he was, unwelcome as was the rough task assigned him, there is not a single sign in that story that he flinched from his task or wavered in it. He was as true to Jeremiah as Jeremiah was to God. He writes his book; he reads his book in the hearing of all the people. When the ministers of the king examine him as to how the book was written, he drops no hint that *he* would have delivered the Divine message in a different, a less abrupt and offensive, way, had he been free to choose. He takes his full share in the responsibility for all that he had done by Jeremiah's command. He does not shrink from the consequences of a course which, left to himself, he would not have taken. He carries, and knows that he carries, his life in his hand. But he does not falter. He goes into hiding, with the Prophet, from the wrath of the king, indeed: but he does even that only on a Divine compulsion; and he employs his enforced leisure in writing down once more all the words of the book which Jehoiakim had cast into the brazier, and in "adding unto them besides many like words."

If this chapter had not been written, and written possibly by his own pen, we should never have known with what anguish of spirit he took the course which the Prophet prescribed, how opposed it was to his own judgment, how fatal to his cherished ambition. It is only from this chapter we learn that when he wrote his book at the dictation of Jeremiah, and was commanded to read it to all the people,—he cried within himself, "Woe is me! for the Lord hath added sorrow to my pain: I am weary with my sighing, and I find no rest." And if these words had stood alone, we should probably have attributed his grief and despair to the natural reaction of eager and sanguine youth against the settled gloom of Jeremiah's spirit, or to a purely patriotic compassion for a race which had provoked so dreadful a doom by its obstinate folly and guilt. That the whole earth, the whole Eastern world, was to be convulsed by the sudden rise and spread of the cruel Chaldean tyranny, that by its spread southwards, the kingdom of Judah, with its sacred city and temple, was to be engulfed in utter ruin,—this surely was enough to set a young and ardent Prophet weeping, to make him feel that sorrow was being piled on sorrow, till he was weary of sighing, yet could find no rest. It is not till we reach the last verse of the chapter that we learn there was another and a more selfish cause for his profound weariness: that he had been seeking great things *for himself*, cherishing a keen personal ambition for place, eminence, authority; and that it was the defeat of this private ambition which rendered his sorrow so poignant and intense.

Nor does this personal weakness, if duly considered, at all lessen our respect for the fidelity of Baruch. It rather tends to heighten our conception of him that, with this bitter private disappointment added to the grief of the patriot and the statesman, he should still discharge his duty to Jeremiah, and to God, with an unblenching fidelity and devotion. For what greater thing can any man do than to be true to duty amid the wreck of his personal hopes, and in the prospect of an utter ruin to his country which his fidelity will do nothing to avert?

For this noble devotion to duty Baruch is rewarded in the noblest way. He is taught a higher duty; a loftier ideal is placed before him; he is called to a more difficult enterprise. God, through the Prophet, warns him of a weakness which he may not have suspected, on which he may even have prided himself. He teaches him the secret of his unrest, by shewing him that he has permitted a personal and selfish ambition to blend with the more generous motives which impelled him to serve God and his country. He invites him to root out this poisonous weed from his soul, to close this rift in the lute before it makes the music mute. "Seekest thou great things *for thyself*? Seek them not, lest, to gain your private ends, you become unfaithful to public duty."

Nay, more: to win him to that self-renunciation without which he could neither become perfect as man nor be fully equipped for the prophetic function, Jehovah supplies him with a motive he could not resist without becoming base in his own eyes. To gratify his ambition, Nebuchadnezzar was about to commence a series of desolating wars which would ravage the whole East, and in which Jerusalem would be turned into a ruin, Judæa into a desert. Was *that* a time in which any true servant of God could occupy himself with paltry personal ambitions? Could any good man, any true patriot, indulge a craving for eminence and distinction with such a prospect before him?

Weighty and gracious as was the appeal, it is not certain that it was successful, that it induced Baruch to cleanse his bosom of "the perilous stuff" against which he was warned. So long as he remained with Jeremiah, he seems to have been true to him. But it is an ominous fact that though he was trained by Jeremiah, though he acted as his "minister" and seems to have been destined to succeed him and to carry on his work, that work was taken up, not by Baruch, but by Ezekiel and Daniel. Baruch, it would appear, was set aside, never became an independent and recognised seer, ambitious as he was of that distinction. And, probably, he was set aside for some such flaw in his character as that which Jehovah rebuked, but rebuked in vain.

In any case he stands before us as a man of fine character and rare spiritual gifts, the promise of which was marred by an admixture of baser elements. Just as the career of Gehazi was arrested by his undue love of money, so that of Baruch was arrested by his undue addiction to place and honour. He never became the man he might have been, because he was too eagerly bent on being seen of men. He lost greatness by seeking great things for himself. He lost the honour he craved by caring more for personal distinction than for the common weal. Though evil was coming on the whole earth, he must still be seeking his own advancement. And hence he saved nothing but his own "life," losing that which he cared for far more than life. His eye was not single, nor his heart pure from private and selfish aims: and so, with all his gifts, all his courage and fidelity, all his training and opportunities, he never became a Prophet, and never achieved distinction in the service of the State.

Ebedmelech

BY REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

"For I will surely deliver thee," etc.—Jeremiah xxxix. 18.

Ebedmelech is a singular anticipation of that other Ethiopian ennuch whom Philip met on the desert road to Gaza. It is prophetic that on the eve of the fall of the nation, a heathen man should be entering into union with God. It is a picture in little of the rejection of Israel and the ingathering of the Gentiles.

I. THE IDENTITY IN ALL AGES OF THE BOND THAT UNITES MEN TO GOD.

It is a common notion that faith is peculiar to the New Testament. But the Old Testament "trust" is identical with the New Testament "faith," and it is a great pity that the variation in translation has obscured that identity. The fact of the prominence given to law in the Old Testament does not affect this. For every effort to keep the law must have led to consciousness of imperfection, and that consciousness must have driven to the exercise of penitent trust. The difference of degrees of revelation does not affect it, for faith is the same, however various the contents of the creed.

Note further the personal object of Faith—"in Me." The object of Faith is not a

proposition but a Person. That Person is the same in the old Testament and in the New. The Jehovah of the one is the God in Christ of the other.

Consequently faith must be more than intellectual assent, it must be voluntary and emotional, the act of the whole man, "the synthesis of the reason and the will."

II. THE CONTRAST OF A FORMAL AND REAL UNION WITH GOD.

The king, prophets, priests, the whole nation, had an outward connection with Him, but it meant nothing. And this foreigner, a slave, perhaps not even a proselyte, a eunuch, had what the children of the covenant had not, a true union with God through faith.

Judaism was not an exclusive system, but was intended to bring in the nations to share in its blessings. Outward descent gave outward place within the covenant, but the distinction of real and formal place there was established from the beginning. What else than this is the meaning of all the threatenings of Deuteronomy? What else did Isaiah mean when he called the rulers in Jerusalem "Rulers of Sodom"? Here the fates of Ebedmelech and of Zedekiah illustrate both sides of the truth. The danger of trusting in outward possession and of thinking that God's mercy is our property besets all Churches. Organisations of Christianity are necessary, but it is impossible to tell the harm that formal connection with them has done. There is only one bond that unites men to God—personal trust in Him as "in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF EXERCISING UNITING FAITH EVEN IN MOST UNFAVOURABLE CIRCUMSTANCES.

This Ebedmelech had everything against him. The contemptuous exclusion of him from any share in the covenant might well have discouraged him. The poorest Jew treated him as a heathen dog, who had no right even to crumbs from the table spread for the children only. He was plunged into a sea of godlessness, and saw examples enough of utter carelessness as to Jehovah in His professed servants to drive him away from a religion which had so little hold on its professed adherents. The times were gloomy, and the Jehovah Whom Judah professed to worship seemed to have small power to help His worshippers. It would have been no wonder if the conduct of the people of Jerusalem had caused the name of Jehovah to be blasphemed by this Gentile, nor if he had revolted from a religion that was alleged to be the special property of one race, and that such a race! But he listened to the cry of his own heart, and to the words of God's Prophet, and his faith pierced through all obstacles—like the roots of some tree feeling for the water. He found the vitalising fountain that he sought, and his name stands to all ages as a witness that no seeking heart, that longs for God, is ever balked in its search, and that a faith, very imperfect as to its knowledge, may be so strong as to its substance that it unites him who exercises it with God, while the possessors of ecclesiastical privileges and of untarnished and full-orbed orthodox knowledge have no fellowship with Him.

IV. THE SAFETY GIVEN BY SUCH UNITING FAITH.

To Ebedmelech, escape from death by the besiegers' swords was promised. To us a more blessed safety and exemption from a worse destruction are assured. "The life which is life indeed" may be ours, and shall assuredly be ours, if our trust knits us to Him Who is the Life, and Who has said: "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

Ebedmelech

BY REV. ROBERT PAISLEY.

"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah," etc.—Jeremiah xxxix. 15-18.

All that we know of Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, is the single act of charity related in the foregoing chapter. When Jeremiah the Prophet, for his faithful proclamation of Jerusalem's approaching doom, was thrown by the princes of Judah into a dungeon, and was in danger of perishing by hunger in the mire with which his horrid prison-house was filled, Ebedmelech, a mere servant in the house of the king of Judah, procured his deliverance by an order from the king. Braving, doubtless, the indignation and revenge

of the princes, he took the first opportunity which his access to the king afforded of representing to him the miserable condition of the Prophet, and the villany of his persecutors. Procuring the assistance of thirty men, he proceeded in person to the Prophet's dungeon, and rescued him at once from his perilous and deplorable confinement, although he could not restore him to liberty. He did what he could : he defended the Prophet's character before the king, and appealed to the king's conscience in behalf of the Lord's servant. He succeeded in at least saving his life, and ministering to his comfort. This is all we know of the man ; but it is enough. God tells us in the text that it was done in faith, because he put his trust in Jehovah, Whose Prophet Jeremiah was. To the Lord it was therefore done, and by the Lord it was not forgotten. When Jerusalem was about to be levelled with the dust, when the nation that God had selected to be His witnesses were to be carried into captivity to Babylon, when the constitution of Church and State which God had established by covenant with the seed of Abraham was to be set aside, and the very face of a visible Church to be for a time abolished, God remembered the Ethiopian eunuch who had done this good deed, in the name of the Lord, to His Prophet, and promised him, by this express revelation made to him in person, and by name, the shield of his salvation. Jerusalem was to fall, but Ebedmelech the Ethiopian would stand in the evil day. As he had delivered the Prophet from his dungeon, and from the cruelty of the princes his persecutors, and the danger of a horrible death, he himself would be delivered in the day of danger, and the men of whom he was afraid would not have it in their power to take his life, or injure a hair of his head. God would be his saviour, and shews him beforehand the certainty of his salvation.

The fact that we know nothing more of Ebedmelech but this single deed of mercy serves only to render the lesson of his history more significant. It marks him out as one of the "Lord's hidden ones" (Psa. lxxxiii. 3) ; a large class doubtless, of whom the world takes no account, whose names are not known, or remembered, or celebrated on earth, but whose record is in Heaven, whose memorial is on high, and who, in the day of the manifestation of the sons and servants of God, shall be acknowledged, to the glory of God, and the condemnation of the world and of the apostate church, before the assembled universe of men and Angels. While many a Christian, and many a Jew, whose name, it may be, has filled the world, shall have a low enough place, or be dismissed to another place with the stern denial of their Lord, "I never knew you," such as the poor Ethiopian eunuch, who have stretched forth the hand of charity to a Prophet of the Lord, or given a cup of cold water to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, shall have the reward of Prophets and Disciples, and sit down in the Kingdom of Heaven, side by side with Abraham, or the greatest of Abraham's seed.

I. WHAT A BLESSED PROVIDENCE IS THAT OF GOD, OVER THE LEAST AS WELL AS THE GREATEST MEN AND THINGS, ESPECIALLY OVER THE GOOD WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS.

Does not Ebedmelech testify to all men and all generations—

1. That no one is forgotten before God, and nothing that concerns the least left out of the regard of the Father of all?

In the care of nations, or churches, or communities of men, such as Israel or the Babylonian empire of Jeremiah's day, such as Britain or Christendom in ours, God does not overlook the case of individuals, or make little account of the minutest part of the conduct of the most insignificant. What a sublime contrast in itself, and to the current notions of men in general, does this passage of God's providence present to our admiration ! It was the hour of Jerusalem's downfall. The first great universal empire of the world was about to put under its feet, and trample in the dust, the city of God. God's anointed king, David's successor on the throne, was a prisoner in the hands of the Chaldeans, his eyes put out, his sons slain, his palaces burnt, and the holy place, the temple in which God Himself dwelt, profaned and levelled with the ground ; and in this great era in the history of the world and of the Church, in this crisis and catastrophe, on which the eye of the world was fixed, and might well be fixed intently then and for ever, God sent His chosen Prophet to cheer the heart of a poor Ethiopian eunuch, one probably of the most despised of Judah's slaves. "Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel," is a message which, in these circumstances, proclaims, to those who have ears to hear, as much of God's character and wonderful work, His loving-kindness, His condescension, His care of the poor and needy, of whom He thinketh, especially in such an hour, as is taught by the whole history of Israel from the beginning. It is truly a sublime and God-like act, shewing as every-

thing shews, that His ways are not as man's ways, nor His thoughts as man's thoughts. The one who was the object of special care to the God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts, in the day of Israel's final overthrow, was one of those who were least regarded by men upon earth, a slave, a eunuch, an Ethiopian, an uncircumcised heathen, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger to the covenant of promise. Who then is forgotten by the God of Israel? Rejoice, brethren; lift up your heads. Be of good cheer, O ye of little faith, who doubt or despond. Ebedmelech's God is yours. Will He that remembered Ebedmelech forget or forsake you?

2 That God is far from confounding the righteous with the wicked in His judgments.

Amidst the judgments which overtake guilty nations, or bodies in covenant with God, every man may at least "deliver his own soul." Ebedmelech was not classed with Israel, nor left, like those who had forgotten the covenant, in the hand of his enemies. He was singled out from the whole nation of the elect. A Prophet was sent to him in the name of the Lord, when the whole people of the Lord were swept from the face of their inheritance, or carried into captivity to Babylon. In the present perilous times, in this dark and cloudy day, when Christendom has so much reason to anticipate the doom of Israel, or one as much more tremendous as our privileges have been higher, and our sin in the breach of our covenant greater, what a thought of Divine consolation is this to all who are of the day, to all who watch and are sober, to all who are not saying with the multitude of slumberers, "Peace and safety!" "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom," said the Saviour to those whom He forewarned of another catastrophe, still more terrible than this of Jerusalem in the day of Babylon's power. Well may you tremble, if you know the signs of the times; unless you remember that your times are in the hands of Him Who remembered Lot in Sodom, and Ebedmelech in Jerusalem, and sent to the one His Angel, and to the other His Prophet in the evil day. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret to His servants the Prophets" (Amos iii. 7), and by them to His people. To that sure word of prophecy see that ye take heed, lest the day of the Lord come unawares, as a thief in the night. The burden of that prophecy is, Malachi iii. 18, "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not."

3. So far from confounding the righteous with the wicked, God contrasts them with one another. What brighter display of Divine righteousness can there be than the salvation of the least of saints in the midst of the destruction of a whole nation, or church of sinners, like the Jews here, or like Christendom, to whose doom we are to look forward? For consolation and blessed hope, so far as we are personally concerned, however dark be the prospect, however near the day of doom, we need nothing more than to know that in Ebedmelech we have an example to teach us the law of God's providence. We need but understand as a personal promise, and apply to ourselves, the prophecy of Jeremiah in the text, "Behold I will bring My words on this city for evil and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee; but I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord, and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword; but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee, because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord."

II. WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE LOWLIEST TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH CHEERFULNESS AND PATIENCE, AS WELL AS WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF EBEDMELECH THE ETHIOPIAN.

1. Ebedmelech is an example. God singles him out from the whole nation of the Jews, and says to us, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." God says, by this message of Jeremiah, to us and all generations, "In Ebedmelech behold the man whom I consider great and good, the heir of salvation." And wherefore? Why are such actions as this of Ebedmelech those which in the sight of God are of great account? Because they are acts of self-denying love and self-sacrifice; because they are thus, God Himself in the text expressly says, the fruits of a living faith in God. Thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord, therefore I am thy Saviour. Thy faith has been as remarkable as the unbelief of My people, and therefore in the day of their destruction I separate thee from these sinners; I hold thee up as a living witness of the righteousness of faith, by a special interposition of My providence for thy salvation. Now what had Ebedmelech done? What was the work of faith which in God's eyes

was so wonderful as to be thus applauded and rewarded? He had helped a poor prisoner, he had delivered out of a dungeon a Prophet of the Lord, whom the nation of Judah despised, whom the princes of Judah persecuted on account of his prophecies, whom the king of Judah would have left to perish, if his conscience had not been awakened by the complaint of this Ethiopian eunuch. He had thus, in an evil day, and in a corrupt church, set his face against the evil that was abounding, taken the side of the Lord against those who should have been His witnesses, and condemned their unbelief by protecting and befriending, at the risk of his life, with the sacrifice of ease or the things that man values most, the man who was the Lord's Prophet, servant, witness. He had done to Jeremiah what Obadiah did to Elijah and other Prophets of the Lord in the days of Ahab and Jezebel; what the jailor of Philippi did to Paul and Silas when his eyes were opened to behold the light of God in their Gospel; what Paul and Silas, and all who are His true followers, have done to Christ when He is denied and persecuted in the members of His body. He had denied himself and taken up a cross by the sacrifice of himself, and the service he performed to God's Prophet. He had, in his place, with very imperfect light, approved himself a faithful servant of the Lord, and that in the midst of multitudes who were unfaithful, and in opposition to the whole professed people of God. This was his faith, expressed not in words, but in deeds. Its work, its fruit, was a labour of love, a sacrifice of self in the Lord's service, and for the Lord's sake.

Is he not a living example and witness of faith? Was not his faith a life, a work of righteousness, a fruit of the Spirit? Was it not, as God's testimony to its labour of love shews, "the righteousness of God"? Was not Ebedmelech a true confessor, whether he knew little or much of the Mosaic law, by whatever means he came to the knowledge of the God of the covenant? Is any knowledge of God or of the covenant of grace, new or old, is any confession of faith of any avail, or any worth, except so far as it makes Ebedmelech in this respect our example, except so far as its work is self-denial and self-sacrifice, the same labour of love, according to our circumstances and opportunities?

2. We may follow the example of Ebedmelech.

A man may be great before God whose outward circumstances are mean or unfavourable, and may expect a great reward. No outward circumstances can prevent us from performing such acts, or acquiring such a character, and receiving the approbation and reward due from Him with Whom there is no respect of persons. It is not his circumstances that prevent any man from becoming great before God, great as Ebedmelech, for it is not his circumstances that prevent any from becoming good, from having the same character, and manifesting in his place the same heroic and holy spirit. How will this slave, this eunuch, this Ethiopian, stop the mouths of Jew and Christian, and put to shame all who would either justify themselves in sin and selfishness, or impute to circumstances, and, therefore, to God, their want of love, of holiness, of the spirit of Christ!

3. Woe to us if we are not like Ebedmelech in unselfishness, or in self-denying love, the fruit of faith! How little are all external advantages without faith, all external privileges, even of a spiritual kind, in comparison of faith, man's only life! Church membership, church privileges, church knowledge and advantages of whatever kind, what will they prove but the condemnation of those who are not like Ebedmelech in character? Is not this shewn, is not this the lesson intended to be taught, by the contrast between his salvation and Israel's destruction? Did not God proclaim by this signal exception, This Ethiopian is the Israelite indeed, more truly so than the whole nation that boast of the law, the covenant, and all the blessings of knowledge and membership in the Church? Is not the Spirit's voice saying to us, if we have ears to hear, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God." (Romans ii. 28, 29). And if a Jew, much more a Christian; if circumcision, much more baptism.

III. WHAT BLESSED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE DOES EBEDMELECH BRING TO MANY OF WHOM THE WORLD IS NOT WORTHY, AND WHO ARE BY THE WORLD AND BY THE CHURCH UNKNOWN!

Who can doubt that God has His hidden ones, like this eunuch, in every age and in every land, who shall be, with Ebedmelech, brought to light, and revealed in glory

in the day of the Lord, of which the day of Jerusalem's doom was a type? Among the glorious things spoken of that City of God to which we look forward as our everlasting possession, is it not one that "of Philistia, of Tyre, with Ethiopia," and other lands sitting in darkness, the seat of Satan's undisturbed kingdom, "it shall be said, as of Zion, this man was born there"? "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, and this man was born there." (Psa. lxxxvii. 6.) If "Ethiopia" is yet to stretch out her hands unto God" (Psa. lxxviii. 31), who can tell how many shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, and to take the place of the children of the Kingdom, who shall be cast as reprobates into outer darkness! Another Ethiopian eunuch (Acts viii. 27) was among the first Gentiles whom the dayspring from on high visited in New Testament times; and everything warns us to beware of confining to Christendom, or any sect or section of Christendom, in its present Babylonish state of worldliness, the hope of citizenship in the Kingdom that is to come. Within Christendom and without, we must never forget the awful words of warning, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last first."

Ezekiel

BY RIGHT REV. CHRISTOPHER WORDSWORTH, D.D.

"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month," etc.—Ezekiel i. 1—3.

The names of the Hebrew Prophets have a sacred significance. Of the four greater Prophets, two prophesied at Jerusalem—Isaiah and Jeremiah; and two prophesied in Babylonia—Ezekiel and Daniel. The names of the two who prophesied at Jerusalem, Isaiah and Jeremiah, are compounded with the Divine Name JAH or JEHOVAH, the appellation of God as the Lord of the other two Prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, who prophesied in the land of Babylon—the great Empire of the world as distinguished from Sion, the Church of God,—are compounded with the sacred Name EL, which designates God in His universal supremacy as Creator and Ruler of all things, and which bears the same relation to ELOHIM as JAH does to JEHOVAH.

Isaiah, which means the salvation of Jehovah, is the first Hebrew Prophet who calls the Messiah the servant of the Lord, and he sets before us more clearly than any other of his predecessors the Passion of Christ. Jeremiah, as we have seen, is the Prophet of suffering, and his prophecies are followed by a national dirge in his Lamentations. He is the type of the *Christus patiens*. But Ezekiel is the Prophet of the glory that would follow the suffering. The prophecies of Ezekiel are introduced with a revelation of glory. He himself a priest, called to his prophetic office at the river Chebar in his thirtieth year, and designated by God throughout his prophecies as Son of Man, (which no Hebrew Prophet who prophesied at Jerusalem ever is); and seeing the Heavens opened, and beholding visions of God's glory, is a signal type of the Incarnate God, "the Son of Man," standing, in His thirtieth year, at the river Jordan, and inaugurated there as Prophet, Priest and King, when, as the Gospel says, "the Heavens opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him, and lo! a voice from Heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

Jeremiah's prophecies begin and end with a vision of suffering; Ezekiel's prophecies begin and end with a vision of glory. The last nine chapters of Ezekiel describe the visionary Temple and the ideal Holy Land, in a mysterious transfiguration, and are prophetic representations of the grace and glory of the Catholic Church, and are like a prelude to the visions of the Apocalypse, and the splendours of the new Jerusalem.

A short time before the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel, the captive Prophet in exile on the banks of the river Chebar, being severed, at a distance of more than 400 miles on the north-east, from Jerusalem, was enabled, by the Holy Spirit, to behold and to describe the strange mysteries of impure worship which were celebrated in the secret chambers and dark crypts of the Temple there; his inner eye was illumined by the Spirit of God, and he was enabled to specify by name the men who were standing there

with censers in their hand, and raising a thick cloud of incense, through the misty veil of which he descried the vermilion paintings on the wall, of grotesque figures of creeping things and abominable beasts of Egyptian idolatry in the chambers of their imagery; he was enabled to see the women mimicking the ritual of Phenicia and weeping for the Syrian Thammuz, or Adonis, in the courts of the Lord God of Israel; and he saw the men between the porch and the altar in Sion turning their backs on the Temple of Jehovah, and bowing down their heads in lowly adoration to worship the rising sun.

The Prophet Ezekiel, dwelling in exile in Babylon, was also enabled to foresee and describe the scene of that last fatal night of Jerusalem besieged by the Chaldean army, when the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, who had mocked the warnings of the Prophet Jeremiah, stole secretly out of his palace with a few attendants, and passed along through the gate between the two walls which were by the king's garden, with his face muffled up in his mantle, and was caught, as it were, in a net, with his companions, by his Chaldean enemies in the plain of Jericho.

Not merely was Ezekiel enabled to see these things, and to describe them, but he was commanded to shew his faith in his own inspiration by enacting them in the presence of the captives in Babylon. He was commanded to portray the siege of Jerusalem by a picture drawn with chalk on a dark brick of Babylon, and to represent its blockade by visible actions; and he was commanded to shew his faith in his own revelations from God by removing his own furniture from his own house in Babylon in the dim twilight, as a token that Zedekiah, the king of Judah, would in like manner go forth in the dusk of the evening from his palace; and he was ordered to declare the meaning of these prophetic actions to those who were with him in Chaldæa, so that, if these symbolical actions had not been realized by that which they were intended to symbolize, Ezekiel would have become a laughing-stock to the captives, and been rejected with scorn by the Hebrew nation, and have never been received by them as an inspired Prophet of God.

Ezekiel was recognised as such by the Hebrew Church; he was owned as such by Christ and His Apostles. And therefore these words and acts of Ezekiel preach to us and to all the world the great doctrines of the Divine Omnipresence and Omniscience, and of our own personal responsibility.

If Ezekiel, at the river Chebar, was enabled by God to reveal the hidden things of the secret chambers of the Temple at Jerusalem, and to specify by name the persons who were there engaged in those unhallowed mysteries, and to see through the thick cloud of the incense which enveloped them; can it be supposed that there is anything in the inmost recesses of our own hearts which the eye of Ezekiel's God does not penetrate and pierce? Can it be imagined that there is any idolatry—carnal, intellectual, or spiritual—which we ourselves practise in the secret crypts and subterranean chambers of the imagery of our own thoughts, which is not clear as noon-day to His view? And can it be imagined that there is anything which He will not bring forth to judgment as He brought forth the men of Jerusalem to be judged by the Man, an impersonation of Christ, whom Ezekiel saw clothed in linen, with a writer's ink-horn at his side, to note down, in a book, the actions of the princes and people at Jerusalem, and who executed sentence upon them, and who also set His mark—a mark, it was, of the Cross—on the forehead of every one, who sighed, cried, and mourned over their hateful abominations, in order that they might be spared in the terrible slaughter which destroyed the rest?

This prophetic representation of the Divine attributes of Omnipresence and Omniscience is combined in Ezekiel with a solemn declaration of the utter hollowness of all mere formal, ceremonial, worship; and of the necessity of a deep sense of our own individual responsibility; and of the duty of searching self-examination and practical repentance, and of spiritual, vital, personal religion.

In the latter days of Jerusalem, before its destruction by the arms of Babylon (as afterward in the time of our Lord and His Apostles, before its destruction by Rome), the inhabitants of the Holy City relied on their religious privileges, and were elated with spiritual pride and presumptuous self-confidence. They vaunted themselves to be the national depositories and guardians of the sacred oracles of God. They were possessors of the Law, the Prophets, and the Priesthood. They dwelt in the Holy City, and worshipped in the courts of the Temple. They thought themselves safe there; they imagined, that because they themselves had been spared, while king Jehoiachin and the queen mother, and many thousands of their countrymen had been carried away captive to Babylon, they themselves must be special favourites of the Lord God of

Israel. They disparaged their captive brethren and extolled themselves: "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord" are we. Theirs was an hypocritical religion of external ceremonies, of arrogant self-conceit, and vainglorious self-righteousness; joined with censorious and rash judgments of others; with malignant scorn, bitterness, and strife, and with supercilious disdain and virulent hate of all who spake to them the plain truth in homely language, such as the Prophet Jeremiah, calling them to the exercise of the moral virtues of justice, righteousness, mercy, and truth, and rebuking them for their neglect of those virtues, and denouncing God's judgment upon them for their hypocrisy. They were a barren leafy fig-tree—a fig-tree rustling in the breeze with luxuriant green foliage, but bearing no fruit—and therefore to be blighted and withered by the breath of God; and Jeremiah represented to them their own corrupt moral and spiritual condition by a prophetic parable—that of the two baskets of figs: the bad figs in the one basket symbolizing *themselves*, Jerusalem and its people; while the good figs in the other basket were emblematic of their captive brethren at Chebar, whom they despised.

The Prophet Ezekiel completed the picture. He beheld the glory of the Lord, enthroned upon the Cherubim, forsaking the Temple of Jerusalem, which was profaned by the sins of priests, princes, and people. He saw the glory of the Lord rising aloft and floating away over the east gate of the Temple to the Mount of Olives, and toward the land of Chaldæa.

Brethren, these things are profitable to us. They warn us that the true strength and glory of a Church does not consist in the magnificence of its sacred fabrics, nor in the splendour of its religious ritual, but in the hearts and lives of its people. They teach us that the verdict of *Ichabod* may be pronounced over us, and certainly will be, if we do not cherish those inner graces of holiness, gentleness, meekness, love, truth, and peace, without which the most splendid Minsters and most pompous Ceremonial are abominable in the sight of Him Who searcheth the heart, and Who requires the moral, intellectual, and spiritual sacrifice of the whole inner man.

Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah were priests, as well as prophets. As such they had a reverence for the Temple at Jerusalem and its Ritual, and for all the requirements of the Levitical Law. They cannot be suspected of any bias toward that fanatical Puritanism which disparages outward forms of religion, and resolves all devotion into a mere subjective spiritualism. And therefore the language of these two Hebrew priests and prophets on this subject is more entitled to our attention. The message of Ezekiel to Israel, a message repeated with earnest solemnity, was this, "the soul that sinneth it shall die." He declares that though the greatest saints were collected together from the Hagiology of every age, and were concentrated as contemporaries in a Church in one age—"though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it—they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters, they shall deliver only their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God."

What is this, brethren, but to teach us that we may not rely for our acceptance with God on the privileges of Church-membership, except so far as we are making those privileges our own by a right use of them, and by bringing forth their fruits in our lives? What is this, but to remind us that each individual soul among us is to be brought singly, one by one, into personal communication and contact with God, and to stand, as it were, confronted, face to face, with Him, and to be left alone with Him, disentangled from all the intertwinings and interweavings of all other souls, and to bear its own burden, and to be placed in independent isolation by its Divine Judge, and to be scanned and scrutinized through and through by His divine eye, and to receive its own sentence from Him, for everlasting bliss or woe, at the great Day.

Surely it is an awful thought, and it is made more awful by the view which the Prophet presents to us of the sinfulness of sin: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." This is the burden of Ezekiel's prophecy. The practical comment which he gives on these words is full of meaning. Ezekiel at the river Chebar had by divine illumination a vision of the siege of Jerusalem: "Son of man, write the name of the day, even of this same day; the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day." Ezekiel had also a prophetic revelation of the miseries of that siege, and of its woeful catastrophe. And soon afterwards, probably on the same day in which Jerusalem was taken, he had another message,—“Son of man, behold I take

away from thee *the desire of thine eyes* with a stroke, yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down." He was forbidden to put on the attire, or utter the lamentations, of a mourner. So (he adds) "I spake unto the people in the morning; and in the evening *my wife died*; and I did in the morning as I was commanded."

The Hebrew captives at Chebar were astounded at such demeanour as this, and asked the reason of it. The Prophet answered them that he himself—he, Ezekiel,—was to be a sign to them; and that what he himself did, they must also do. They had hoped for a speedy return to Jerusalem, their own home—their whole hearts were there. Jerusalem was the *desire of their eyes*; it was dear to them as a wife; but Jerusalem was to be suddenly smitten. God would take it away from them by an unexpected death-stroke. In them were to be realized the words, "I spake unto the people: in the evening my wife died." The fall of Jerusalem was the death of their wife. And yet they must not weep or mourn for its fall. "Ye," says the Prophet, "shall do as I have done." They were not to weep or mourn even for the destruction of Sion by the armies of Babylon; but they must mourn and weep for something else. All their tears were to be reserved for *that*: all their sorrow for the destruction of Jerusalem was to be merged and absorbed in sorrow for *that*. And what was it? It was *their own sin*, and the sin of their countrymen; for this it was which caused her fall. Ye shall not mourn nor weep for the destruction of the city and the Temple, dear as they are to you. No; but what does the Prophet add? "*But ye shall pine away for your iniquities and mourn one toward another.*"

Brethren, here is instruction for us all. No sufferings, however great,—not the loss of a dear wife, not the disestablishment of a national Church, not the ruin of a beloved Country, although these things are entwined with all our tenderest affections,—are to draw forth from our eyes a single tear, in comparison with our own sins, which are the real source and well-spring of all our miseries in Church and State. We must pine away for our own iniquities and mourn towards one another.

At this present time we ourselves may be trembling for the safety of our own Sion. And we have cause to do so. Let us therefore look inward. Let us examine our own hearts and own hands. Let us scrutinize our own lives. Let us seek and pray earnestly for grace, that we may feel more deeply the heinousness of our own sins. Let us put away all envy, strife, hatred and malice, and be at one among ourselves. Let us cleanse the sanctuary of our own hearts. Let us cherish the graces of faith and love, truth and peace, kindness and equity, which are its best ornaments—ornaments for more lovely than the sculptured lilies and carved cherubim and palm-trees which decorated the Temple of Solomon. Then God will be with us. Then the glory of the divine Shekinah will not float away from the courts of our Sion to the lonely river of some distant Chebar. And no armies of Babylon will ever be able to destroy the walls, and to profane the Holy Place of the Temple of our Jerusalem.

Once more; whatever in God's providential visitation may be in store for our own Country, and for our own Church—whatever may befall other Nations and other national Churches—Ezekiel, at the river Chebar, provides comfort for the faithful in every age and clime. The destruction of the city and Temple at Jerusalem was like the death of a beloved wife. It was a sadder pang to them than the death of his dear Rachel to the patriarch Jacob at Bethlehem. The expatriation of the citizens of Jerusalem from that dear, dear home, their dispersion as wanderers and captives in a far-off heathendom, was like a national widowhood and a national orphanhood. But yet the Lord God of Israel was the God of all true Israelites in Chaldæa as well as in Judah. He is the God of every land and every age. He is JEHOVAH ELOHIM. And this great truth was brought out more clearly by the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, and by the scattering of her princes, priests, and people into the far-off regions of the East. They learnt thus to realize God's Omnipresence. They learnt that true religion does not depend on the material fabric of a Temple, however glorious; nor on its religious Ritual, however gorgeous, and even though it be prescribed by God Himself; but that it depends on the presence of God in the hearts of His people. The glory of the Lord God had been seen by the Prophet Ezekiel riding away in the clouds on the winged chariot of the Cherubim from the Temple of Jerusalem. And why? Because that Temple was profaned by the sins of the worshippers in it. And this migration of the God of the Temple was a signal that He had given it up to

destruction. But that glory of the Lord was seen by the Prophet in the wilderness of Chaldæa on the banks of the river Chebar, four hundred miles from Jerusalem; and God had said to him, "I will be your Sanctuary."

Thus it was revealed to the world, that though Thrones may totter and fall, though Cities may be thrown prostrate on the ground, though Dynasties, Empires, and Kingdoms pass away like visionary shadows and spectral phantoms, though Nations may be scattered, and national Churches may fall, yet there is the same JEHOVAH,—the same Triune God—ever sitting enthroned on the Cherubim, ever riding on His winged evangelic chariot of the fourfold Gospel throughout the world; and though we be exiles and prisoners in Chaldæa with Ezekiel, or with St. John at Patmos, yet with them we may have visions of God. And this blessed assurance is confirmed to us by the Holy Spirit speaking to us by Ezekiel, and revealing to us in the last nine chapters of his sublime prophecy the glories of the Church of Christ Universal, which is our indestructible Sion, and summing up all with those memorable words,—“the name of the city from that day shall be JEHOVAH SHAMMAH,”—the LORD IS THERE.

Ezekiel

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

“Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song,” etc.—Ezekiel xxxiii. 32.

These words are spoken of the Prophet Ezekiel; he is as the lovely song, as the pleasant voice, as the instrument of music, all this even to the worldly mind; yet we might have thought otherwise; so full is he of woe, of the wrath of God; and how dark and obscure are his visions! Should we not say of him rather as of his Divine Master, Who “speaks by the Prophets,” he is “without form or comeliness,” “there is no beauty that we should desire him”? Yet so it is, very beautiful is the lightning though it be a messenger of wrath, and the breaking forth of the burning mountain. Thus they made much of this Prophet, as if there were something attractive about him; they come to him, they assemble at his house, they ask for his revelations, and sit before him. Let us consider what there is in his history and in his prophecies that will account for this.

The great Prophets came for the most part in succession; when one departed another arose, as watchman in the dark days; they passed on the lamp one to another; for God left not His Church without witness; but now when His people were divided, some being still left in Jerusalem before its destruction, while others were carried captive to Babylon, the light becomes twofold; Jeremiah and Ezekiel both prophesy together; but the one in Jerusalem, the other at the same time by the river Chebar in the captivity of Babylon; for Ezekiel had been taken there among the captives eleven years before Jerusalem was destroyed. It is said that his prophecies were also carried from thence at the same time to Jerusalem; and those of Jeremiah were brought to Babylon: thus these two great Prophets united as it were their lights together; though vast distances intervened, they mingled their tears.

How great a change must have come over the mind of an Israelite who had been carried away to Babylon; the great city of wonders; the seat of Oriental magnificence,—of the wisdom of the ancients; where the Chaldeans watched the stars in the broad expanse of Eastern plains; the country whence Egypt itself derived its language of mystery, making “living creatures” to represent the spiritual and divine. Like St. Paul at Rome, he is a captive; but “the Spirit of God is not bound”; nay, is more free in chains. And now to speak to captive Israel, he takes up his parable from Babylon; and applies the new imagery and scenes of the East. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is henceforth known by a new name, as “the Lord of Hosts,” the God of those armies of Heaven Whom the Babylonians ignorantly worshipped. With new language does the Spirit clothe itself, and one meet for that language is chosen; the earthen vessel is moulded by the Divine hand for this use. As the Gospel comes to us in the garb of Greek and Roman simplicity; these Prophets speak with the wonderful visions and symbols of the East: each with its appropriate adaptation of God.

Nay, not only the images by which God speaks, but scenes and events themselves are changed; the Children walking in the fire; the Saint in the lions' den; the Hand of fire writing on the wall; these are things of a new character; they are of Babylon, not of Jerusalem; or rather they are of Jerusalem in Babylon. The coming of Christ is foretold in a new manner; in Daniel, one like the Son of God is seen with His faithful ones walking in the midst of the flames. In the Prophet Ezekiel the Incarnation is set forth in a vision of four living creatures where the Throne of God is; the living fire is there; the face of a Man; the Lion to speak His Kingdom and strength; the Ox the sacrifice of His death; the Eagle His Resurrection and Godhead. Now these considerations will account for the peculiar character of Ezekiel; and why in the Prophet of the captivity more than in any other it was fulfilled, "I will incline mine ear to the parable: and show my dark speech upon the harp." When they sat down by the waters of Babylon, and remembered Zion and wept, in shadowy and sublime outline they saw in its dark waters the reflection of the spiritual Zion, and through the visions of Assyrian allegory spake to them the mysterious wisdom of God.

But before entering further into the subject, let us consider what it is in Christ Himself which is peculiarly to be found in Ezekiel? for as our Lord spake by the Prophets, so in the Prophets severally seems set forth something in His own ministry. Now, in addition to many expressions which remind us of our Lord's own words, I think we may hear His voice in those heavy denunciations which Ezekiel declares against the Jews. In the Gospels are the terrible Woes pronounced against the Pharisees after their day of visitation was past, and their "house left unto them desolate"; so in Ezekiel, when the sentence of condemnation was already gone forth, we hear the awful Voice by the Prophet, "thou shalt speak unto them whether they will hear or whether they will forbear," "for they are most rebellious": such is his commission: his "face is made strong" as adamant against their faces; "thorns and briers" are with him, as with Christ, when He wore His crown of thorns; and he also "has his dwelling among scorpions," that same "generation of vipers," of whom our Lord Himself speaks.

It might then at first sight appear inconsistent with this, that the Prophet Ezekiel should in style be considered so engaging, that even to those to whom he was sent with heavy tidings he should be as one that had a "pleasant voice"; in like manner, that although the roll which is given him is "written within and without," "with lamentations and mourning and woe," yet it should be in the mouth of the Prophet, that is, to the natural man, "as honey for sweetness."

Yet this is in accordance with much we find in Scripture; for instance, what could be more sternly severe and full of reproof than St. Stephen's speech at his death? But on that occasion, "looking stedfastly on him, they saw his face as it had been the face of an Angel." Thus God arrested their minds till His martyr should speak to them all his burden of sad admonition. In like manner there is something of deep interest and beauty in the visions, the similitudes, and the images which Ezekiel uses, and unwilling minds are held by them till they have heard all his warnings; not only thus, but they continue with them unforgotten, and such as will not be put by. Thus our Lord's own warnings of the terrible Day of Judgment have mostly come to us under the dress of most striking parables and figures. Who does not listen with interest to the parable of the Ten Virgins; of the Householder taking account with His servants; of the King coming in at the Marriage Supper; of the net which the Angels are emptying and sorting on the shore; of the Shepherd dividing His sheep from the goats? These will be always remembered by those who would be most willing to forget the Day of Judgment itself. In like manner the solemn prophecies of St. John in the Revelation, from the types and symbols in which they are expressed, engage the attention of the natural mind, and so carry on and hold up to every age the witness of God.

For these reasons then we need not wonder if the Prophet most commissioned to declare messages of Judgment, should be found in language most figurative, most picture-like of inspired writers; that the watchman and the witness for the captives should be apparelled, not in the sublimity of the Prophet Isaiah, nor the tenderness of Jeremiah, but in the oriental imagery of Ezekiel.

Again, such types and figures have a life such as no mere words of themselves can have, they clothe themselves with form and spirit, and continue. Thus the images of Ezekiel not only speak of themselves in the place where they are found; but they come up again and are of frequent occurrence in the Apocalypse, as if still waiting

for their fulfilment. Thus indeed, much that is in Ezekiel is also in St. John; things which already have been in some sense fulfilled; but even now are fulfilling themselves, and yet to be more largely and worthily fulfilled. The vision of the four living creatures for instance, in Ezekiel, is found again in St. John; it is still before us; still new; we know much of what it means, but we have much more yet to learn. The glory of the Lord coming from the East; His voice like the noise of many waters; the earth shining with His glory; these and many such things in Ezekiel are reproduced in St. John. In both, the Angels of judgment are represented as waiting till the children of God are sealed with His "mark upon their forehead." Gog and Magog with their armies are both alike in Ezekiel and in St. John as about to come forth in the times of the end. The assembling of the fowls to the great sacrifice is in both. And especially that subject of many chapters in Ezekiel, the measuring of the Temple and the vision of the Holy City, is marked in both as yet to be. As Joseph said to Pharaoh, the vision is repeated, because it is established of God, and soon to be fulfilled by Him. Thus things in Ezekiel over which the tide of ages seems to have rolled, come up in St. John; all as showing that it shall be perfected in measure, in number and weight; that, notwithstanding the confusion that prevails, there is a secret order incomparable in beauty, and every gem hath its place assigned of God. The memorable vision too of the dry bones has been more than once fulfilled in some sense, but still awaits its last completion.

Now I have said that one effect of types and similitudes such as these is, that they may not die away and be forgotten; thus if we look to those subjects of Holy Writ which arrest at this day most attention in the world, we shall find it is such figurative prophecies; every age, nay, every scene of popular interest has its interpreters and their readers, who apply such things to passing events; in a manner indeed very inadequate, and perhaps unprofitable and vain; yet, however mistaken, they serve to keep alive the knowledge of them; God will not have them hidden and lost; every time that a conspicuous enemy, real or supposed, springs up, there are interpreters that cry out, and many that hear them saying, this is the Antichrist that is to be. So that in this way, people are made to know and remember that the great enemy of God has been foretold, is to be always expected, and at any time may be at the door.

Such are some reasons for the symbolic language of Ezekiel; it is a language suited for all times and countries, that never grows out of date, or loses its power. Add to which it may be naturally accounted for by the character and circumstances of the Prophet, and the heavy tidings he had to bear. Strong feeling does always naturally express itself in figures and similitudes; it gives vent to itself in burning words that take form and are full of life. Thus the Psalmist first says, "My heart shall muse of understanding," and it is to this he adds of opening his ear to the parable, and showing his dark speech upon the harp. Now Ezekiel was in delivering his prophecies thus eaten up as it were by a burning fire with. "I went," he says, "in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me." For seven days he sat among his people as one astonished ere he opened his mouth. Moreover, he himself was made to drink deeply of the cup of affliction in his prophecies: he was made to them a sign and a terror from the heaviness of his burden, to add weight to his words, "Thou shalt bear thy burden in the twilight, thou shalt cover thy face that thou see not the ground, for I have set thee for a sign to the house of Israel." His wife, the desire of his eyes, was taken from him at a stroke, and he was forbidden to mourn; he had to eat of bread foully polluted that he might so speak the more powerfully: he had to lie on his side in fasting and bonds for many days, to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel and of Judah. "Sigh therefore," it is said to him, "thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes," in order that they may ask, "Wherefore sighest thou?" Thus it is that in reading the Gospels, we, my brethren, are made to ask, why our Blessed Saviour sighs. As St. Paul, lest he should be puffed up by the abundance of the revelations that were made to him, had an angel of Satan sent to buffet him, and had laid on him a multitude of sorrows: so had Ezekiel the like mark of Christ; that his words might have weight as one that bore about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Ezekiel is peculiarly addressed as the "Son of Man," and it is observed by St. Gregory, that it is whenever he is called to the vision of things Heavenly he is thus designated by that name in which our Lord Himself ever delighted, when He went about in the power of His Godhead. Thus as a plant which when crushed gives forth its sweetness, as from the grape trodden under foot is the Wine of God; and from the corn thrashed and ground is the Bread of Life: so was

Ezekiel stricken of God that he might speak the more powerfully in the likeness of Christ. And O the blessedness of that suffering, the inestimable value of that affliction which gives us power to speak the words of God! And well did he need visions and words of power, for nothing else would reach the hearts of those to whom he was sent. As our Lord Himself so often repeated the words, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear"; so God says by Ezekiel, "He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbear, let him forbear." "Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; thou shalt speak My words." "Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see and see not; they have ears to hear and hear not."

For these reasons the prophecies of Ezekiel, like our Lord's own miracles and parables, present things more to the eye than to the ear; for thus they more powerfully reach the mind. Hence the whole style and character of Ezekiel; where another Prophet persuades, Ezekiel sees a sign or symbol and leaves that to speak. This might be shown in instances out of number. Thus Isaiah says, "the law shall go forth from Mount Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"; but Ezekiel instead of this sees the vision of waters going forth from the threshold of the Temple to the four quarters of the world. He sees, and describes at great length as he sees, the Shepherd and the sheep, the dark mountains, "the cloudy and dark day," and quiet waters. He sees the burning forest, while they cry out in mockery, "Ah, Lord God, doth he not speak parables?" But the end of God is answered by their attention being thus arrested by his visions, for it is added, "then shall they know that there hath been a Prophet among them."

He is raised in visions by the Spirit far above; he is among Angels and the secret providences of God before they go forth on earth; he sees and hears as it were unspeakable words which it is not for man to utter; and therefore he is called the "Son of man"; he walks near to the ground and mourns; with a fire within that drinks up his spirit. He sees deeply into the spiritual nature of God's judgments; and that although in things temporal children are punished for their father; yet in very deed before God none bears but his own burden, as he explains throughout the 18th chapter; and that amidst temporal judgments which are dark and inscrutable all things work together for good to those that love God. He is set as a watchman to watch for the morning, and descries its light from afar, while fires as of Mount Sinai blend with the milder radiance of Pentecost. He is the Prophet of Christ's second coming no less than of His first. As in the Day of Judgment amidst sights and signs the most sublime and terrible, will be manifested wonderful depths of God's wisdom, the reach of His Providences, and the scales of eternal justice; so throughout this Prophet amidst visions and imagery, great, striking, and awful, there occur full and clear enunciations of God's mercy and truth, the rising of His temple, the sublime and wonderful but most beautiful order of His ways on earth, bearing onward the Throne of the Incarnate Son of God. Such is the style and the course of this the great seer of Eastern captivity, while amidst all this we hear from him as his one great message the first words of our Prayer Book, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, he shall save his soul."

Thus then it is that the Prophet Ezekiel being so intimately connected with our Lord's own teaching in the Gospels, and being bound up more than any other Prophet in the Revelation of St. John, comes especially home to us Christians, the Israel of God in the Babylon of the world; to them that are for awhile in the furnace of affliction that they may come forth purified; hewn out and broken and fitted by His hand that they may be living stones for His temple that is to be; a remnant ever found in the ruins of the visible Church. "Although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary, saith the Lord God."

One of the Christian fathers, St. Jerome, says that he was used when young to go on the Lord's Day into the caves at Rome, where the Apostles and Martyrs were buried; and there in silence and darkness amid the chambers of the dead to meditate on the visions of Ezekiel; and that thus he learned to approach them with awe and reverence, not with idle curiosity, and so in some measure to understand them; seeing light, he says, as in the dubious obscure, and exclaiming, "I have found Him Whom my soul loveth, I will hold Him fast and will not let Him go." Thus, "in the cloudy and dark day," in the times of affliction, we may understand Him better than now we do. There is no doubt that the Prophet Ezekiel and the Revelation of St. John are especially intended for the edification and comfort of Christians in the last days, those of "the great tribulation." And here I would observe that those who are singled out by the

seal of God in their forehead to be safe under those His judgments, are not described as those who have done any great thing, but such as "sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst of the sanctuary."

One word more of caution; a holy Bishop who has written largely on Ezekiel, the great St. Gregory, has applied it to the examination and correction of our own heart, and building up the soul in righteous. Thus we know that the temple of God of which so much is said in Ezekiel is in one sense our own soul. Happy he who mourns for all pollutions and abominations that have been there, who puts out from thence all idols, and makes it fit for the indwelling of God. Blessed is he who keeps his heart tender and low to understand His Prophets, whether the plaintive voice amidst the ruins of Israel, or the dark harp by the waters of Babylon. Let it not be said of us as it was of the Jews, "We have mourned unto you" with the voice of Jeremiah, but ye lamented not; "we have piped unto you" with the prophecies of Ezekiel, but ye listened as to a lovely song or instrument of music, ye heard and did not.

Ezekiel

BY REV. F. D. MAURICE, M.A.

"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year," etc.—Ezekiel i. 1.

Ezekiel was, like Jeremiah, of priestly order. Since we cannot understand the expression "thirtieth year," otherwise than as describing his own age, he was probably older than Jeremiah was when the word of the Lord first came to him. But he had not reached the time of life which we commonly connect with our impressions of a Prophet—those impressions being perhaps derived from the great painter of the Prophets and the sybils. He had, however, seen and felt what might have made his hair grey even at such an age. He had seen the best king Judæa ever had dying in the war with Egypt; his successor a captive there; Jehoiakim passing from one foreign yoke to another that was more grievous; Jeconiah doomed to hopeless servitude in Babylon. He must have mixed with those miserable priests and prophets who rent the heart of Jeremiah. He was himself taken from the services of the temple with a troop of rich and noble prisoners; he had to sit among them astonished at their levity and indifference; to watch their alternations of cowardly despondency and idle hope; to hear the prophets uttering divinations as vain and lying as those which they uttered in prosperity; to find himself amidst strangers, his own countrymen being scarcely less strangers to all that was occupying him than their oppressors. To be removed from the city which God had chosen as the witness for Himself; to be in a land full of altars and temples and images, given up to idols and yet triumphant over the earth—what did it mean? who could tell him? The captives by the river of Chebar could tell him nothing. They might be stupified by the change; the signification of it was utterly hidden from them.

It was while he sat among these captives that he saw visions of God. The words seem only to imply that he was dwelling ordinarily with them; we are not prevented from believing that he was alone, out of the din and clatter of human tongues, when he saw the "whirlwind coming out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire." Retirement was not impossible even for a captive; we need not doubt that Ezekiel availed himself of so great a privilege. But we ought to recollect—the words force that thought upon us—that Ezekiel was not in circumstances favourable to contemplation, that he was not assisted by familiar objects, that his mind had not been kept quiet and calm from disturbing influences. The Heavens were not opened to an abstracted philosopher or devotee any more than to a man in the midst of the comforts of a home, reposing in an undisputed faith; but to an exile drawn by force, not choice, out of his land, full of the darkest thoughts about the past and the future, tempted by every thing he heard and saw, to doubt whether there was any reality in the things which he could not see and hear.

The question naturally suggests itself to a person who reads this opening chapter of Ezekiel and then the after parts of the Book, what have they to do with each other?

Why should it be necessary that a man who had to announce the moral maxims which form so conspicuous a part of this prophecy, should first begin with seeing the likeness of four living creatures, and wheels within wheels, and a chariot lifted from the earth, and rings so high that they were dreadful, and a firmament over the head, and a throne with the likeness of a man? How should this be a preparation for telling the watchmen of Israel, that, if they did not warn the sinner of the evil of his ways, his blood would be required at their hands? How was it a preparation for the argument which proved that a son was not to die for the iniquity of his father, that the proverb, "if the fathers have eaten sour grapes, the children's teeth are set on edge," was a lying proverb? How was it a preparation for the personal sorrows which the Prophet was to bear? We might have expected, it may be said, some high and mystical imaginations to have mixed with the simple precepts; we may not wonder at those difficult passages respecting a more august temple than the one Nebuzaradan set on fire, which occur at the end of the prophecy. But why should such a vision as this be the initiation of a seer who was to concern himself with the coarsest evils and miseries of the actual world as much as any of his predecessors?

If you reflect, brethren, on the position and duties of a Jewish Prophet, you will not be at a loss for the resolution of this difficulty. We are wont to say that the theology of the Jew was simple, that of the heathen world complex and artificial. We speak rightly. But however intricate the relations of the gods may seem to us in the Greek pantheon, however interminable their offices and attributes in the pantheon of the Hindoo, every one of these divinities has acquired its place and recognition from some natural instinct in the human heart. Priests may have organized the worship, may have made that systematic which would have been incoherent. But some sensual perception, some movement of a man's nature towards an object which inspired him with terror and hope, some tender association or local sympathy, the struggle of some inward conception to find a suitable expression for itself, may be traced through every variation of a people's worship, may be discovered in the production of every fresh idol. If therefore by simple we mean easy, natural, that which men would adopt if left to themselves, we are bound to change our mode of speaking, and to say that polytheism is more simple than the belief of a One living God. We revolt at such a conclusion—we cannot help revolting at it—but that revolting is a proof that the word "simple" is *not* synonymous with the words "obvious" or "natural," that the most obvious views of the Godhead may be the most coarse and sensual and false.

Are we to conclude then that a belief in the Divine Unity is the result of a series of experiments which show how a number of different forms may be expressed under one general name? Are we to say that, when nations have acquired greater powers of abstraction, they arrive at this belief? Reason will tell us, experience will tell us if we do not listen to reason, that a god who is abstracted from a multitude of gods, is not a living being at all; but a mere *caput mortuum*. Dear and venerable traditions, whispers of the conscience, longings of the heart, prevent men from saying, "it is nothing." They invest it with the old name, they try to look upon it as the highest concentration of the life which they see moving through all things. But gradually as the intellect becomes bolder and the affections and fears which have sustained it are dried up, the terrible secret is first whispered, then openly proclaimed: "This abstract divinity *is* nothing; it is not a substance but a shadow of our minds. We who created it can destroy it."

The simplicity of the Jewish Prophet arose from this; that he did not follow his instincts and impulses whithersoever they led him; that he did not make any effort to reduce the things which he saw under one common name; that he asked for a substance beneath himself, for a living Being deeper than all the thoughts which were in him, than himself to whom those thoughts belonged,—for One Who had made him in His own image. He believed that such a Being had revealed Himself to his fathers, was revealing Himself continually. He was about his path and about his bed, spying out all his ways. To know Him was to know Righteousness and Truth; to keep His law, to be conformed to His mind, was to be righteous and true.

Hence several consequences followed. The first is that he uniformly spoke of *seeing* God, of having a *vision* of God; using this language most carefully when he was protesting with the greatest vehemence against every sensible representation of God. As truly as the summit of any mountain existed though it was lost in mists, so truly

did God live though none confessed Him; as truly as the summit of a mountain discovered itself, the mists gradually rolling away, so truly did God unveil Himself to the man himself, forcing him to recognise His presence and to feel that he stood in the most wonderful relation to Him. This revelation could only be described as the coming forth of a Light; it was not the light of an outward sun; it must be the Light of which that which is gathered up in outward suns is the image. It was not a bodily eye which received this light; but it *was* an eye; you could give it no other name. God Himself must have opened it that it might behold Him; in His light it saw light.

Hence it followed also that the theology of the Prophets was the ground of all human morality. Every perception of what man is and what he ought to do must rest upon some perception of what God is and of what He does. To affirm what image it behoves a man to show forth without referring to the archetype: to lay down rules how a man should govern himself and others without declaring how God governs, was in their minds a vanity, nay an impossibility. It seemed to them an utterly vain thing to call upon men to carry out any right conviction or to turn from any evil if they could not say confidently, authoritatively, God Himself is bidding you take this course, is bidding you forsake that. He is near you, urging you and therefore enabling you to fulfil His commands, to cast away all fetters which hinder you from fulfilling them.

These principles are common to all the Prophets, and yet I think you will see why they were sure to come forth with a new power and under new aspects in the mind and discourses of Ezekiel. An Israelite in the land of the uncircumcised, a priest banished from the temple, is an object we have not yet been invited to contemplate. At first the sense of loss—if it did not give way to that *insensibility*, that incapacity of feeling at all, which the best men often experience after some heavy calamity—must have been unspeakable. Had not God utterly forsaken them? Could He be in that place? Then out of this loneliness and despondency would come the certain conviction “He must be here.” The forms of Nature which have been set up as rivals of Him, do they not testify of Him? That whirlwind from the North which I hear gathering at a distance, which now approaches me, which seems to encircle me with its gusts and eddies;—that cloud with its fantastic mocking shapes;—that subtle mighty fire with its mysterious circles and involutions, with the beauty and radiance which make one forget for a moment its more terrible ministries;—and then those forms of animal life, the different kinds of living creatures in each of which the Chaldæans have seen some image of divine power, each of which has been to them a consecrated idol, which in our Temple expressed not objects of worship, but the Seraphim and Cherubim who cry Holy, Holy, Holy, to the Lord of the whole earth;—what forms and symbols are here, what a world of mysteries I am dwelling in! But these creatures to which the men about me are bowing down, do they not point upwards to Man himself? Is there not stamped upon them all a likeness and prophecy of him? It seems as if his image were continually emerging out of their forms, as if he were the object and pattern after which they were all aspiring. Yet they preserve their distinct natures, their several functions. What unites them together? How can natures so various, so dissonant, be living portions of the same universe? I must go deeper still. These creatures,—to what do they owe their movements, their life? That eagle has wings which lift him from the earth and sustain him as he rises towards the sun. The Chaldæan sees in him the manifestation of the highest, most celestial power. But he looks upon the lion, the ox, and the man, as also manifestations of this power. He would clothe them too with wings. He supposes them tied to earth but with a capacity of ascending above it. And he cannot be wrong. For there is in Man a spirit which gives him wings, which carries him into the highest and most distant worlds. Is he not meant to obey this spirit, to ascend by its power, to exalt all the lower creatures with him? Is not this the true secret of the order which I discern in the midst of so much disorder? Is there not a spirit which gives all things their distinctions, their places, their kinds;—which is the spring of their movements, which binds them together, wheel within wheel, preservng unity amidst infinite diversity?

I do not pretend, brethren, to thread the mazes of this wonderful vision. There is much of it in which I cannot the least see my way; I feel how dim and faint my glimpses are of those portions of it of which I have any apprehension. But I do not think I can be wrong in believing that the Prophet, cast into the wide world and feeling

himself lost in it, was led by the Divine Teacher into a region of thought to which the Israelite had been hitherto comparatively a stranger—was led to see how each part of the universe, which must have often seemed to him a storehouse of divided material idols, was pointing when seen by the divine Light, to a spiritual unity as its explanation and its centre.

To a *spiritual* unity; for whatever different meanings the vision may be susceptible of, this is certainly implied in them all, that it is Spirit only which distinguishes and unites, which brings each thing forth in its clearness and fullness, and brings all into harmony. And that truth, precious as it is, would still be a maimed and imperfect one, a vision of the world, and of man as meant to rise above the world but unable to distinguish himself from it, if the spirit which is in the living creatures, actuating and inspiring them, lifting up the wheels from the earth, and working in the midst of them, were not acknowledged as a spirit which had come from some higher region. The man who was seen among the animal forms, the man who rose above them, is still not humanity in its highest perfection. Ezekiel saw a Throne, and there was a likeness, as of the appearance of a Man, above upon it. There is One human and Divine, from Whom this spirit has proceeded, in Whom it dwells perfectly. Beneath that Divine form is a glory, too awful for the Prophet's gaze. He falls upon his face and listens while a voice speaks to him.

"Is it then," some one will ask, "in very deed the mystery of this day (Trinity Sunday) which the Prophet's vision is bringing before us? Does not such a notion proceed from the eagerness of the imagination to find analogies where they do not exist, or from our foolish desire to establish a doctrine which is above comprehension, not by a simple appeal to faith, but by hints and allusions drawn from teachers who would have been utterly perplexed by our interpretation of their thoughts and language?"

Brethren, let me speak plainly on this point. I do not say that you will find the doctrine which we have been proclaiming to-day in this chapter. I do not believe that you can. I have not the slightest wish to find it there or to put it there. It would be a shock to all my convictions if I thought that Ezekiel was enunciating a dogma when he professed to be recording a vision; or that the mystery, which, as the Church teaches us by the order of her services, could not be revealed till Christ was glorified and the Spirit given, was already made known to the Prophet as he sat among the captives by the river Chebar. I cannot say how much mischief seems to me to be done, when instead of striving to follow strictly the actual statements of the Old Testament writers, we insist upon wringing out of texts or symbols, which we have moulded according to our fancy, the proof of some New Testament revelation. It is not the Law and the Prophets only which suffer from such violence. The Gospels and the Apostles suffer much more. The truths which they set forth as living foundations of our existence social and personal, shrivel into jejune formulas, subjects for controversy and reviling, prized mainly as tests by which other men may be convicted of error.

But just because this course seems to me so exceedingly dangerous, so carefully and religiously to be avoided, I would try to learn from the old Prophets what they knew and how they became possessed of their knowledge. Ezekiel had been taught upon his mother's knees the words, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord"; he had been trying to fulfil the commandment which is joined to that great announcement, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy strength." He had been carried into a land where every thing seemed to contradict this faith. What he saw might tempt him to worship many gods. Or it might tempt him to ease himself in his Judaical profession, in his Levitical lore. He might say, "I have been trained to a certain worship and I will adhere to it. Let the Babylonians have their gods if they will; I shall do homage to the One." Such a resolution would have a look of steadfastness and fidelity. And it had this further advantage. No Babylonian would have interfered with it. The Jew, like every other tributary, was expected in general to follow the traditions of his fathers; they might strike the conquerors as very absurd; but except on special occasions, or when the tyrant was a fanatical devotee, they would be respected as suitable to the person who had inherited them. But Ezekiel cannot follow this course. He cannot live upon a tradition. He cannot find rest in merely thinking of the difference between him and the Chaldeans. He is not faithful to his traditions, unless he believes in a God Who is as living for

him as for his forefathers. He cannot worship the Lord God of Israel unless he worships Him as the God of the Chaldeans also. It was a grand thing no doubt to know that there is One God, a blessing beyond all blessings. But merely to deny that there are many Gods, was that a blessing? Merely to hold a dogma that was contrary to other men's, was that a Divine gift? The Teacher Who is near him, Who is preparing him for a work, will not let him be content with such a miserable possession. He draws him into the secret of unity. He shows him how all the manifold things which he beholds imply it, demand it, cry out for it. He leads him to a unity which is not a dead negation of plurality. He makes him feel that there is no unity in matter, that we only believe in unity when we believe in a Spirit. He brings him to think of man as the interpreter and ruler of all the things to which he has done homage, as the priest who is intended to present them to the Lord of All, because he is a spiritual being. But Ezekiel perceives that he can only fulfil this kingly and sacerdotal function when he is under the government of a Spirit Which is higher than his own. That Spirit must come from a Man, that Man must be the Priest of priests, the King of kings. Even there he cannot stop. There must be a deeper mystery still. There must be One of Whose glory this Man is the brightness, of Whose person He is the express image.

So much I believe was revealed to Ezekiel. By slow steps, by painful experiences, he was led into the heart of this mystery. It was his deliverance from idolatry. It was his deliverance from hard, material, negative Judaism. It was the ground of his message to his own people and to all nations.

I do not believe that this mystery is the mystery of the Trinity; because Christ says that the time would come when He would tell His disciples plainly of the Father. There is here no utterance of *that* Name. The Prophet sunk down in awe and wonder at the presence of the Man on the Throne. Beyond was fire and the brightness of amber; glorious and transcendent images, no doubt, upon which a man may gaze and in which he may lose himself, but which he is glad to leave for any thing that recalls him to a home and to human sympathies.* Till a Name expressing the deepest awfulness in fellowship with such sympathies could be uttered, till the Man on the Throne could be declared as the Son, the only begotten of the Father, till that Spirit in which Ezekiel saw the ground of all the unity of human beings and earthly things could be proclaimed as He in Whose unity the Father and the Son dwell for ever, there was still a dark enigma which every new idolatry, every new philosophy, was trying to solve, and by the solution was drawing men further from the eternal Truth and the eternal Love. But though I do not find here the statement and development of that mystery which I regard as the fundamental one of our dispensation, I do think that Ezekiel is one of the greatest guides of mankind into an apprehension of it. I call it the fundamental truth of our dispensation. I mean the truth which lies beneath the unity of the Church and of human society, the truth which reconciles the contradictions of warring philosophical systems, the truth which interprets the different idolatrous faiths of the old and the new world, the truth by virtue of which those who are baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost become the heralds of a common life and a Divine Kingdom to all nations, the truth which sets forth the full righteousness and love of God, the truth upon which therefore the moral condition of man will be found ultimately to depend. But, brethren, I am far indeed from saying that any age of the Christian Church has entered fully into the inheritance which God has given us. There has been a confounding of the Persons and a dividing of the Substance by orthodox men as well as by heretics, perhaps as much by one as the other. There would have been no strifes, and contradictions, and heart-burnings, if it had not been so. And oh, how dare I affirm that we, at this period, are truly and faithfully acknowledging the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty worshipping the Unity? We are doing it perhaps at times. We may long in our inmost hearts to do it continually. But we must, I think, one and all, be conscious of difficulties, far more serious than any that disturb our intellectual apprehension of the doctrine, which interfere with this holy and blessed service. Every thing is received according to the character and capacity of the receiver. How should a set of quarrelsome and factious men know any thing about the unity of God?

And therefore Ezekiel's vision contains another lesson—shall I call it a prophecy?—for us. It may be, brethren, that we shall be initiated into the fulness of this truth in the very way in which he was initiated into the part of it which he could

know. It may be that only when all the signs of God's presence are withdrawn, only when there are no churches or confessions or forms of worship testifying of His Name, only when we are surrounded by idolaters, or when pantheism—the complex or abstract of idolatries—has become the profession of all cultivated men, or when a conscious atheism has taken place of an unconscious one among statesmen and among priests—it may be that then only shall we know what a power was lying in the old creed of Christendom to interpret the mysteries of nature as well as those of our own minds and of our human relations. It may be that the physical world, which seems so clear to us, will itself present to us only a mass of confusions and contradictions, and that, in order to recover any distinct apprehension of its laws, we shall have to see how they are connected with a Spirit Who is higher than themselves. It may be that through nature we shall be led, not, as our fathers of the 18th century fancied that they were led, up to nature's God—Who proved to be only a great Demiurgus, a Being apart from all human sympathies—but to the Man in the midst of the Throne, Who, when we come to Him weary and heavy laden to seek that lowliness of heart which we have not in ourselves, will teach us of the Father. And so we may become little children again and recover the joy which our Pagan forefathers felt when they were first told of One Who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son for it, of a Son Who died for them, of a Spirit Who guideth into all truth.

Ezekiel

BY REV. A. MACKENNAL, D.D.

"Also the word of the Lord came unto me," etc.—Ezekiel xxiv. 15-18.

The Prophet's discipline of sorrow is the subject suggested to us in our text. Sorrow is here set before us not as personal chastisement, but as part of the training by which the Prophet was enabled to do his work; the reason of this strange command was Israel's blindness, not Ezekiel's sin. This is one view of sorrow; a true view, unrecognised as it may be by many, too readily overlooked by us all; the incident in the life of Ezekiel illustrates the way in which God still fits His servants to speak to their fellow-men.

I have called it a "strange" word which came from the Lord to Ezekiel; it may strike some of you as harsh and unnatural. Ezekiel is forbidden to show to his wife any of the honour which is due to the dead; he must not give way to the natural grief, to indulge which is to assuage it. The 16th verse recognises the Prophet's love for his wife; she is "the desire of his eyes." The 17th verse is full of references to the common funeral customs in a priest's household, the enumeration of them shows the hard necessity under which the Prophet felt himself. Neither the dearness of his wife, nor the suddenness of his bereavement, is to relieve him from the fulfilment of his prophetic calling; his very sorrow is to be made a means of arousing the people. All this is laid upon him by the God Who made the husband's heart, and of Whose compassion all human tenderness is but a shadow; the God in Whose sight the death of His saints is precious; the God Who is revealed to us in Christ's pity for the bereaved, and the tears which Jesus mingled with those of Mary and Martha at Lazarus' grave. It is strange; and the strangeness of the bidding should lead us to search into the meaning of it. The Prophet himself makes no complaint of its harshness; and as we study the story, it will no longer seem unnatural. For such a man as Ezekiel, and in his circumstances, it was most natural that, under this severe and sudden stroke, he should "forbear to cry, and make no mourning for the dead"; that, instead of shutting himself up in his own sorrow, he should go out among his fellow-countrymen to utter the message with which his soul was burdened.

We must not think of this word of the Lord as if it were an audible voice addressed to a weeping man, and bidding him stay his tears. The call of duty is a word of God; and duty is often incompatible with the indulgence of personal sorrow. Business arrangements, public obligations, engagements that must be fulfilled, often summon men from the house of death; sorrow must give way to necessity. The Prophet's call

was his supreme responsibility; the word of the Lord was unmistakeable. Standing alone, a Prophet of the Lord in the midst of a thoughtless people, the call to him to leave the wife for whom he knew the stroke of death was waiting, was a Divine call; the same Divine necessity urged him, when his wife had died, to stand before the people, if perhaps they might ask him to unfold to them the meaning of his stroke; he did as he was commanded.

Nor was it as an outward and unwelcome restraint upon his grief that this duty pressed upon Ezekiel; his was a constraint of the heart, and the word which bade him speak to the people was a merciful word. The heaviest burdens are not those which we can weep away. Tears would have cooled the fever of the Prophet's distress; the intensity of his sorrow was seen in that he made no mourning for the dead. The grief that lies too deep for tears may be relieved by action; the sternness of duty is welcome, the harder the more welcome, to a distracted spirit.

The word of the Lord was recognised by Ezekiel in the intensity of feeling which was aroused within him. Death is not the crowning grief; the agony of suspense, the dread of anticipation, are more than the sorrow of bereavement. The worst has past when we can say "all is over." Nor is that the intensest sorrow which is personal or private; anxiety on behalf of others, the sight of their stolidity, may be almost maddening. The death of his wife appeared to Ezekiel but the prelude of manifold evils about to befall his people. God was going to profane His sanctuary, the excellency of their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, that which their soul pitied; their sons and their daughters were to fall by the sword; and they were careless and unheeding, it was impossible to arouse them. The blow must fall upon them suddenly; they would be stupefied when it fell; they would neither mourn nor weep, but pine away for their iniquities. This was what Ezekiel foresaw; a stroke for Israel, sharp and sudden, like that which fell upon himself; how then could he indulge in personal sorrow? His own affliction was charged with a prophecy of universal bitterness; it was a Divine impulse which sent him out to utter his warning; the word of the Lord came to him, bidding him "not to mourn nor weep," but "speak unto the house of Israel."

We must think, then, on these two facts, the Prophet's insight and the Prophet's duty, if we would understand the Prophet's discipline of sorrow. He is called to a knowledge of God's doings; this relation to God makes him peculiarly sensitive of spirit. He is called to speak to men; his relation to them involves a peculiar necessity of trial.

The Prophet's insight necessitates a discipline of peculiar sorrow. Ezekiel gives us the Scriptural idea of a Prophet. He was a seer; his eyes were opened to behold more than other men; for him the veil of the visible was undrawn, he was ever gazing on hidden spiritual things. He had visions of God; in the whirlwind and the fiery cloud he beheld the pomp and glory of the Lord; he heard the voice of the Almighty in the roar of the tempest "like the noise of great waters," the "voice of speech as the noise of an host." He had visions of men; when he thought of the Temple, he beheld not only the place where the Lord dwelt, it was also the scene of the apostasy of Israel and the elders; "chambers of imagery" were laid bare with all their loathesome forms, men worshipping the sun and "women weeping for Tammuz." Every common natural object was to him a spiritual symbol; the lion bereaved of her whelps, the flying eagle, the fruitless and the wasted vine, spoke of Israel's rage, Israel's pride, Israel's worthlessness and danger. The ordinary doings of men aroused in him many an indignant thought and many a dire foreboding. Careless workmen building up a wall with untempered mortar were the types of lying prophets; and the stormy wind, the overflowing shower and great hailstones, prefigured the destroying wrath of God. A brazen pot heated to redness to cleanse it from its scum, was a symbol of the fire by which alone Israel could be purged. The sight of a sword and the watchman on the walls made him think of God's sword and of God's Prophets. An outcast infant spoke of the desertion of God's people; and adulterous women of the people's shamelessness. He saw what all men saw; but he beheld in these things what they could not see. The whirlwind and the eagle, the wall and the brazen pot were before the gaze of all men; to the Prophet they suggested other sights; their portentous symbolism was revealed to him alone.

To have the vision thus purged is a privilege which brings its penalty with it; the sight may be too clear for happiness even when the objects seen are not in themselves

painful. In some states of the body men's sensitiveness is acute even to suffering. They see too much, their hearing and sense of smell are too keen. Were our sight at once to become microscopic, we could not bear to open our eyes. In other states of the body the perception is too intense; the feeling of time and space and weight is enlarged till minutes prolong themselves, and vast abysses open out, and there is a sense of overwhelming pressure. The poet, the philosopher, who see in all around them the moving of an eternal life; who trace in the towering mountain and the tiny pebble, in the rippling brook and the rolling sea, in each waving leaf and every breathing beast, the endless operation of an unbounded order, are not lighthearted men. They are often borne down by the manifestation of a stupendous presence; the daisy at their feet stirs within them a marvellous awe. To the Prophet, who sees not only life everywhere, but God; who recognises not order only, but moral purpose; who sees the infinite holiness and the unerring judgment; there is oppressiveness even in his joy. But he must see the largeness of God's designs and the certainty of His operation ere he can proclaim it; the Word of the Lord is to him a burden before it is a word.

The Prophet sees, moreover, not only God, but man; he has insight into the human heart. Man's self-will is over against God's righteousness; there is strife between the Divine purpose and human perversity. The vision cleared by gazing on the infinite holiness is skilled to detect the world's depravity; God's earnestness is encountered by the flippancy of His creatures. God's purpose—"never hasting, never resting"—vindicates itself against human disorder; the Prophet sees what men are, what they are throwing away, what their perils are; above all he sees what sorrow, as well as what composure, is in the Father's heart, he is in fellowship with the long-suffering God. Here is a stern responsibility attaching to the Prophet's call; he is in fellowship with God, he is no less in sympathy with his brethren. They were Ezekiel's countrymen who were bent on their ruin; all were dooming themselves to the judgments which were coming on them unprepared. When he thought of Israel, the nation seemed to him as a charnel valley, full of bones, very many and very dry. The order of God's providence presented itself to him as the roll of a book, written within and without, wherein was written lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

Moreover, it was the truth concerning God and God's people which was thus made known to Ezekiel; and hence he could not forget it. What appeared to the Prophet was divinely revealed to him; these were not his own forebodings, the dreams of a despondent man; had they been so he could have shaken them off. They were not the fictions of a highly wrought imagination, ready to die out as life resumed its ordinary current; his certainty of them was part of the consciousness of his call. At every season when his vision was clear these realities were beheld by him again. Any circumstance might recall the sense of their imminence; each new national disaster awoke a train of strong emotions; any personal grief might suggest once more the fact of Israel's danger. The death of his wife was thus not a private calamity, to be borne as men bear such sorrows; it stood connected with a series of Divine judgments. The visions of God moved before him in a long and mournful procession; and the grief, which weeping might have relieved had it stood alone, passed into a despairing terror for Israel which forbade his tears to flow.

It is thus that the perceptions become exalted to anguish; thus personal calamity is aggravated to the man whose eyes are open, who hears the Word of the Lord and has visions of the Almighty. The whole mystery of life and death, the conflict between God and man, is ever before him. Each passing bell summons him to gaze on a dying world; the sufferings of children are the symbol of a terrible righteousness; every individual sorrow is a key to unlock the chamber of the woes of humanity, the electric contact which sends along the chain of universal life a thrill of pain. The comfort of bearing "alone, or in the narrow circle of his kinsmen," a private grief is denied the Prophet; the gift of spiritual vision makes him ever sensible of a wide-spread curse, and lends to his personal sorrows the added burden of an overpowering awe.

The Prophet's relation to men involves a peculiar discipline of sorrow. Ezekiel has to declare his visions; he utters his message, and it is disregarded. The Jews treat him as a vain dreamer; scorn him as one who raves. Again they listen to him, as men listen to preachers now, as to an actor, whose skill brings together affecting images which may relieve the tedium of an idle hour. They come to him, as men

go to church now, with the same feeling with which they would look on a tragedy or read a romance; that they may be charmed into pity, soothed into luxurious melancholy, or aroused into fictitious terror. "Son of man, the children of thy people still are talking of thee . . . saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not."

There is no distress so great as to have earnestness thus trifled with; to feel for men an apprehension which they will not share. Moreover, it exposes the Prophet to severe strokes from God. God will arouse men; if the Prophet's words cannot make them thoughtful, He seeks to touch them by the Prophet's sufferings. Not only had visions been opened up to Ezekiel; he was himself a sign to them. He had taken a tile, and drawn on it the city, Jerusalem, and lain down against it, enacting a mimic siege. He had made for himself bread defiled with filth, and eaten it before the people; that they might understand the horrors of famine which were before them. He had shorn his hair and beard, and with fire and knife and scattering he had destroyed it; to indicate to the people that they were to be wasted by the sword and pestilence and flight. And since they were still dull of apprehension, they were to be aroused by the sight of the Prophet's wretchedness. Therefore does God take from him the desire of his eyes, and bid him not to mourn; it is as we read in verse 19, that the people may come and say unto him, "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" A solemn part, this, my brethren, of the Prophet's calling; to suffer in order that the people may be awakened. It is a mode of dealing not quite unknown to us. The common saying, that a man's life is more efficacious than his teaching, is of wider application than you are apt to think. There are lessons in our history as well as in our example; there is instruction in "the story of our life from year to year," as well as in our conduct. You sometimes ask why good men, men of large usefulness, ministers of the Gospel, seem chosen out as special subjects of suffering. Here is one answer; it is to make you think; to arouse your interest and quicken your conscience and draw your heart; to make you see the "truth embodied in a tale," which you refuse to listen to "in closest words."

His discipline of sorrow fits the Prophet for speaking to men in another way; God had a remnant in Israel, a remnant who should be won. They who escaped in the day of trouble should come to Ezekiel, and Ezekiel was being prepared to sympathise with them. Then his mouth would be opened, he should speak and be no more dumb; many of those bereaved in the capture of Jerusalem would understand the "sign" of the widowed Prophet. He who would speak on God's behalf to men, must understand men's hearts as well as God's judgments; must know the woes and wants of individuals as well as the general story of human depravity; and there can be little sympathy where there has been little sorrow. Every one who would be greatly useful must expect this discipline. If you are to comfort mourners, you must have seen affliction; you must know the smart of the wounds you seek to heal. You desire to strengthen the faith of the doubting; one way of doing this is to fight your own doubts and gather strength. You would appeal to the tempted; you must know what temptation means, must vanquish the lying spirit, the worldly spirit, the spirit of unrighteousness; in many a battle, hard pressed and sorely won, must come the skill you seek. There is no other way; you cannot help in struggles of which you have had no experience, nor calm anxieties you have not felt. To every shepherd of souls Christ speaks as He spoke to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." You know how Christ became exalted a Prince and a Saviour. The Captain of our salvation was made "perfect through sufferings." "In that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

Consider, now, the many hearts to which the Prophet has to speak, the many woes he has to comfort, the many consciences to arouse, the many doubts to dispel; the manifold needs of a people, to whom God has sent him with a message; consider that into the compass of one short life has to be crowded the experience which shall acquaint

him with a people's feeling and give him access to the spirit of a people; you will not wonder at his discipline of sorrow. Increased sensitiveness, a clearness of vision often bordering upon terror, an intensity of emotion beyond the scope of tears, will be his; yes, and multiplied afflictions, stroke upon stroke in quick succession,—all God's waves and billows going over him—will be needed to fit him for his work.

In illustrating this incident in the life of Ezekiel, I must have been speaking of a training peculiar to Jewish Prophets in the time of Israel's apostasy; I have been unfolding principles common to every nation and every age. The discipline will vary according to circumstances; according to the people's folly and sinfulness; according to the readiness with which the messenger gives himself up to his call; but the discipline itself is the same for every true herald from God to man. Conspicuously is this true of the Christian ministry; everyone who has indeed felt himself moved of the Holy Ghost to take on him the work of the ministry, must recognise this as part of his call; in solemn stillness we have to offer ourselves for this education of suffering. But it is not confined to these. Every true word spoken to man, every word which we feel to be at once human and Divine, has been a burden on some soul. The poet's song is thus inspired: "They learn in suffering what they teach in song." The books we love best have been written so; the men to whom we betake ourselves for consolation and teaching, and for help in our struggles, have been taught by sorrow. Those rare lives, too, which are themselves a Divine message, lives full of meaning, having in them the power of an inspiration and the tenderness of sympathy, have been under such training. On earth, as in Heaven, when we view the shining robes of saints and ask, "What are these, and whence came they?" the answer is the same: "These are they which have come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple."

To sufferers we say—Your discipline is not for yourselves alone; it is intended to give you enlarged knowledge of God and broader fellowship with men. To recognise this at once may save you many a stroke, as you are reconciled to God's purpose in your training. For experience depends not only on the number and variety of the scenes through which we pass, but also on our readiness to learn; on our sensitiveness to receive, and the carefulness with which we treasure up, our lessons.

A word to Christians. You are fired with a noble ambition to be useful; you would value nothing more than to have power with God and influence over men. It is well; well, too, to count the cost. I speak not to daunt you, but that you may be prepared for your discipline. "What," ask you, "are preachers ever urging us to a life which involves such tribulation?" Even so, I answer; this is the way in which we are fitted to serve our generation according to the will of God. And your call to service, if it be of God, will be repeated again and again, until you obey it. Ezekiel, at a later period of the history, was apparently sitting down in silence, indisposed for further prophecy, when the vision of the watchman startled him, and the awful words of God—"Their blood will I require at thine hand."

I might show you many other truths connected with those on which we have been dwelling. The Prophet's life is not all of sadness; his is a sensitiveness to gladness as well as to grief. Christ is praying for His servants; God strengthens them. There is no nobler life than one of full spiritual emotion; no nobler work than that of saving men. A life of such usefulness on earth will find its full meaning in the eternal world. If angels are "ministering spirits," what are the spirits of the perfected saints? The tenderness and wisdom gained thus can never be lost; they will be made use of in God's work of wiping away tears from off all faces.

But think of this; herein we see the righteousness of God. The same constitution of society which makes it possible and inevitable that the called and chosen should suffer thus for others, made it possible and inevitable that God should "give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer," and "to enter into His glory." If one could not suffer for another, if one could not be blessed by another, what place were there for the Gospel; how could we be saved by Christ? The social constitution in which we live is the sphere of our redemption; and the law of sacrifice is the law of life.

Daniel

BY MOST REV. E. W. BENSON, D.D.

*"There came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man," etc.—
Daniel x. 18, 19.*

Who is this that in the presence of the Angel is so weak and feeble, that for a while he cannot bear even to hear him speak; that he faints, and loses speech and sight before him? It is one than whom few nobler, few greater, or more courageous men have ever been.

In the most marvellous period of the most singular of ancient empires,—the age and empire which stands as the symbol of anti-Christian power—Daniel was the right hand of all-powerful Kings.

The world has never seen more rapid conquerors than they were; more absolute or more effective rulers; and when they were at the height of their power, their prime minister was the last man we might expect,—a Jewish Prophet.

One monarch succeeded another, but the minister changed not; even dynasties changed, and he still held the reins of power.

From early manhood to extreme old age he fell not from his dangerous position, or if he may be said to have once fallen for a day, it was but to return with double honour.

There have perhaps been other men in history whose influence may have been as great and nearly as unbroken. But where shall we find one who has so reigned by the same means?

We know the injustice and the corruption, the thousand false arts, the shame worse than death to which many have submitted, whom the world has called great ministers.

But this man neither practised nor bowed down to any such things. He is like one man only in modern history—that St. Bernard with whom Kings and Kingdoms took counsel, knowing that they should hear nothing from him but the right and the true. What marks these two from first to last is the dignity with which they keep their way. The world sought them when they most displeased it.

Daniel, then, is a noble example of the good, great man. He had known what it was to be a captive and a prisoner and a slave. He knew what it was to be a despot's counsellor and rule half the civilised world; and the one thing which upheld him in his first estate, and guided him to the last, was his clear sense of his own position before God and Man; a large wide view of his own being; a clear view of his earthly master's claims on him, and overspreading and bounding all other things and thoughts, the Fear of God—thorough Independence of man, perfect Dependence upon God.

For there is a false Independence of character, and also a true and lofty one; Independence of character in itself is neither bad nor good; except we are independent we cannot be manly; but there is an Independence which is not only wrong, but weak.

In common life the Independence of one man is that which impresses all with a sense of power, which makes others give way to him; which lifts him certainly from one stage of influence to another.

The Independence of a second may be of such a grain, and so worn, that it will have little value—that it will frequently bring him into false positions; he will sacrifice justice to maintain it; it will seem to him by its requirements to sanction much harshness; there awaits it the certain forfeiture of friendship and of influence.

Now these two kinds of Independence which often wear the same appearance, and act in many details in precisely the same way, seem to differ at last in this—viz., that one is the result of Self-esteem, and the other is of a very strong sense of Responsibility. That is to say, they are in reality as different feelings as we can conceive, though in many things outwardly they look very much alike.

A strong sense of Responsibility is the true source of genuine Independence of character.

To feel and know what we are, where we are, that we have real duties, and are really answerable in the most minute particulars for doing them, and for our manner of doing them—this constant thought and insight is the mother of all real and lasting Independence of character.

It is an old maxim that no one can command who cannot obey. He will never understand his duty to inferiors, or their duty to him, who has not learnt, and does not steadily practise his own duty to superiors.

If you ever see or know one whose ascendancy over others is a marked characteristic of him, which he seems to possess by nature, you may be certain that his common thoughts are not about ascendancy; they are about obedience to his part in life.

What was the kind of Independence which marked the prophet and statesman of whom we speak? Was it that kind of independence which was determined to make it felt that neither king nor subjects could dispense with his services? Was it *haughty* independence? Was it that secret independence which looked onward to the time when it would throw off the cloak of servility, and reveal itself in its own supposed greatness, and change and trample on all that had hitherto vexed and fretted and impeded it?

Observe how zealously, how humbly Daniel *serves*; see with what reverence he speaks to his master the king,—“Thou art a king of kings. The God of Heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory, and wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all.”

But, mark again, this language of homage is not held while he is rising. It is when he is in full power. Again, it is not the language of the lips which expressed no real emotions. When he foresees days of darkness coming down upon his King, he is “astonished one hour, and his thoughts trouble him.” Each prince in turn finds in him so zealous a minister that first he is placed on the king’s council, and then is created provincial governor of Babylon, then is made third ruler of the kingdom, lastly, by Darius, he is made the first president of the council of three, who controlled all the Satraps of the empire.

Yet, look at the other side of his character during the progress which so honoured and developed his great powers. His first act of all, the act of his youth and his captivity, is positively to refuse to obey in taking the unlawful diet. Next we find him intercepting the Royal Edict, and going with a remonstrance to the king himself against his tyranny. Next when the darkness and the madness are coming down over him, Daniel utters to him the last advice, which he had intellect to comprehend; “Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.”

To Belshazzar, offering to invest him with new dignities, his language is, “Thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another.” Not often have been heard at the revels of the tyrants and the men of sin of this world warnings so solemn, and prophecies so bold as those in which he reminded the weak, bad prince of his father’s pride, and of his father’s madness, and of his own headstrong impieties, and told him that the judgment was come.

But even in that hour, because Daniel spoke with insight and hid nothing, and quailed not and yet trusted not in his own strength, and stood not on his own dignity but endured as seeing Him that was unseen; therefore the king was silent, and only conferred rank and honour on the messenger of wrath.

This Prophet was a true man. He strove by prayer and thought to fill his heart and mind with truth, and to him therefore his God was not a name, nor was He some great power seated in the Heavens out of sight, of Whose will and ways he was not certain.

To him God was within him and round about, and encompassed him on every side, and His will was always certain, for it was always truth and justice and righteousness; and therefore to him the great earthly king was seen in clear undazzling light; when his words were just, it was well; when he gave him work to do he did it; but when he set himself against God’s will, then would Daniel have nothing to do with him, nor give any heed to him, any more than if his words were wind.

When a royal edict prohibited prayer for a time, it cost him not one thought or fear; the hours of his day were spent as usual. “King Darius signed the writing and the decree. Now, when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime.”

The Prophet, with all his Independence of character, ruling provinces, standing before kings and reproving them, how did he behave when he was alone with God?

Remember his softness and tenderness, his window opened towards his home, and the man in prayer upon his knees three times a day there. Or think of him, as when in my text God's message came home to him, and he says, "There remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned into corruption, and I retained no strength."

It was because realities to him were real. Let us pray that we may not live as though the things of sight, touch, and taste were real, Heaven and eternity shadows, but that we may feel that God and God's law alone are real, and that usages, however prevalent, and principles, however accepted, which are not after God's Laws, will one day pass away, and leave us, if we have trusted them, solitary, helpless, and broken.

Daniel

BY REV. RICHARD HODGSON, M.A.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed," etc.—Daniel vi. 10.

Daniel, like most of you, was a busy man. Even your business cares and anxieties could scarcely compare with his. We all know something of the arduous life, the incessant wear and tear, the late hours of a prime minister in England, and we can conceive what must have been the calls on the time, the strength, and the brain of Daniel, the grand vizier of that mighty kingdom, where in his own person he would have to comprise most of these offices which now-a-days are divided amongst many. Then if you have temptations in business transactions to do that which is not strictly honourable, or at any rate would not be thought so in other ranks of life, if you are seduced on all sides to enter into speculations which, if unfortunate, your own capital would not cover, and must therefore entail loss and misery on others, if, in fact, without going into details, you are surrounded in your life as merchants, or manufacturers, or bankers, with many dangers, what, think you, must have been the corresponding trials of a man in Daniel's position—ever tempted to consult expediency, ever tempted to secure his own position by that flattery which seems to have been so congenial, nay, almost necessary, to an eastern despot, ever in danger as the favourite of the moment, and therefore tempted to put out of the way every suspected person, having it in his power to aggrandize himself or to oppress his enemies, subject doubtless to all sorts of solicitations for his own exiled countrymen, as well as the people of the land? Indeed, brethren, I know not how any man could well have been more busy than Daniel, how any man could have been in a position of greater trial and difficulty.

Yet notice, first, he preserved his integrity. He was altogether honest and honourable, and that not because that vile proverb says "honesty is the best policy,"—for it may be doubted whether this would have been so in an eastern Court, certainly it would not have been so in this case had not God miraculously interposed—but Daniel was honourable and straightforward because taught to be so by his Jewish catechism, on which a large part of our own catechism is founded, whose teaching, I would stop to remark, is the most fitting that is possible to train up a child in strict honour and truthfulness; and many a clergyman and layman will bear me out in my assertion, that where this moral teaching of the catechism has been neglected you do not find that scrupulous regard of truth, or of *meum* and *tuum*, that courtesy and respectfulness of conduct one to another, that you will generally observe in those whose minds have early been imbued with its precepts. I am referring, of course, in both cases to those whom all consider as respectable members of society; for of course I know that some, though not many, of our greatest criminals have been taught their catechism in early infancy. But I affirm, without fear of contradiction, that in every rank of life that man or that woman who has been properly taught the Church catechism is, generally speaking, the person you would like to have dealings with,—whose honesty you could trust in a penny as truly as in a hundred pounds, whose society would be the most pleasant, behaviour most courteous, and word most reliable, and friendship most true.

But to return, I was saying that Daniel was honest and honourable because his religion taught him to be so. Amidst temptations of which we can form no adequate idea, like Joseph in the Court of Egypt, Daniel in the Court of Babylon preserved

intact his integrity. His enemies, we are told, "could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him."

Secondly, notice his prayerfulness. This was so marked that though we are sure there was no Pharisaic ostentation about it, it was well known that the chief minister of the kingdom was a man of prayer; his *hours* of prayer were likewise matter of notoriety. No doubt he had often left this business or that to attend to them. Christian brethren, do you do so? Why, many of you cannot attend here twice even on a Sunday. No doubt Daniel had made it a rule that nothing should interfere, whether business or pleasure, with those stated times, which no doubt also he had carefully considered and wisely arranged as most convenient beforehand.

How, perhaps it may be asked, could he have found leisure sufficient? Well, Christian brethren, a busy man will always find time or make it, as we say, for a *needful* purpose. The busy man knows the value of time, can arrange its hours and minutes so as to make the most of them, and whilst the idle man would delay and procrastinate, he would know the wisdom of finishing any work he had to do in its own order and consequence. So Daniel found and put aside convenient seasons for stated prayer thrice a day.

As we Christians, with our faces towards the east, where we look for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, so he, with his face towards Jerusalem, where all his hopes were anchored, "kneeled upon his knees," and prayed, and gave thanks before his God."

The Prophet had been taught that prayer was a duty, so he made time for it; he found prayer to be absolutely needful for him, just because he was so busy, and was surrounded by so many temptations; so at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the day he appointed a season for it, that God's grace might prevent and follow, God's everlasting arms might be around him all the day. He experienced, too, from oft communion with his much-loved Father, the blessing and pleasure of prayer; so that he ran to it as his greatest daily joy, and allowed nothing to interfere with it. And who can doubt that it was on account of his prayerfulness, his close intimacy, his frequent talking with God's Spirit, that Daniel became so holy as to be reckoned amongst the three holiest men who ever lived? and who can doubt that this was the secret of his inviolable integrity and honesty! Some of our best statesmen and soldiers, whose names are almost household words, have followed his example and reaped his blessing. And most of us, I am sure, would do the same did we but believe as we ought in the power of prayer, and look out for an answer to prayer. It is the fashion of certain philosophers not only to deny the existence of the devil, but also to deny the power of prayer in the present day, and to look upon those who employ it as little better than fools. If any of you have been led by their silly utterances to neglect this duty, let me ask you first to examine your conscience and see whether you were not anxious to find some excuse, on the authority of others, to relieve yourselves of a disagreeable duty, and whether it is not rather this than a disbelief in the good of prayer that inclines you to omit it, and then let me earnestly entreat you to try the power of real, true, heart-poured prayer. You will not be disappointed; only, I say, try it, in all fairness prove it and try it before, on any authority or for any reason, you give it up. If only you will pray with intelligence, with meaning earnestness, in deep humility and reverence,—if then you will look out for an answer, you will not be disappointed. You will indeed wonder at the many answers you obtain, and at the loving wisdom—so superior to your petitions, often weak and foolish—with which your Heavenly Father complies with the real and best desires of your heart; and in time, but perhaps not for a long time, the season of prayer will become the happiest portion of the day, so that you too will allow neither business nor other pleasure to interfere with that greatest of pleasures and most important of businesses. In speaking about insanity, Dr. Johnson remarks: "If a man kneels and prays in the street, we call him mad; now it certainly is much greater folly not to pray at all; only that is a more common case." And truly, Christian brethren, when we remember that the whole of this life is but, as it were, our school-days, and the real life, for which these school-days are to prepare us, is in eternity, there can be no greater madness than to go on from day to day with nothing that can be properly regarded as prayer; for the soul can no more live and flourish without it than the mind without exercise or the body without food.

Now let us notice Daniel's brave courage. The decree of the wicked plotters is thoughtlessly signed by his friend the king. But no idea of expediency, no subtle temptation, to save himself for the good of the nation or his own people, or, at any rate, to say his prayers in secrecy; (and doubtless Satan suggested all this and more): no, nothing; not even the natural fear of such a horrible death, can allure the Prophet to neglect his known duty. On his knees, his window open towards the beloved and longed-for city, "he prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"; and the sequel we know,—how that God Whom he served continually, delivered him from the lions. And even now, as surely, and to a thoughtful mind as miraculously, God does and will deliver His praying people. And true faith will teach us also to trust in God, even though, for reasons unknown to us, it may seem good to Him not to deliver us from some particular danger or trouble, or not to answer our petition for temporal blessings in the exact way that our foolishness thinks best. True faith, which constant prayer alone will produce, will teach us that whilst all spiritual blessings are freely bestowed, bodily or temporal mercies are sometimes wisely and kindly withheld; and true faith will also teach us that God will make all things work together for good to them that love God.

Lastly, notice that Daniel prospered. He had everything that this world esteems most highly—long life, wealth, honour, power. He lived through many reigns and revolutions, and was promoted by each successive ruler. And he prospered simply and solely because he loved and served God Almighty with heart and soul and mind and strength. "And is the preacher going to say," perhaps some of you are whispering to yourselves, "that every one who loves God will thus prosper?" No, brethren, because a Christian's promise is of tribulations and sufferings in *this* world, and prosperity in the next. But I am going to say boldly and fearlessly that, other things being equal, the most likely man to prosper, even in this life, is the holy, pure, self-denying, God-loving, God-praying man; and no Christian worthy of the name has ever had need to accuse God of treating him hardly and refusing to hear his prayers. The wicked do often flourish as a green bay-tree; but who envies them? Are they really flourishing? Was Haman in the zenith of his power, or Ahab when he had got all his soul longed for? Are they really happy? Do they truly enjoy their prosperity? Could you only look into the secrets of their heart, sure I am you would find that in the midst of their luxury and fancied enjoyments there is a worm at the root; there is no peace to the wicked. Therefore boldly I affirm, the only prosperous man, even if reduced to the liberal grant of so-called parish relief, is the godly man.

I hasten to offer a few short exhortations. Let all young men especially read the Book of Daniel. Observe that temperance, sobriety, and chastity, in fact, moderate fasting, is almost necessary for the culture of intellectual powers—the growth of the brain, as opposed to that of the body. Learn that, as that noble nonjuror Spinckes has said, "prayer without study is presumption, and study without prayer atheism." Daniel was a man most beloved of God, yet was thrown into the lions' den, and had other dangers and troubles to meet. Do not expect, then, to be free from trials and great sorrows. We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; we must be conformed to our Master Christ. Never be laughed out of the custom and habit of prayer. Kneel on your knees, if old age or bodily infirmity do not prevent you. Thanksgiving as well as praise is a most important feature of prayer. Learn that courtesy to all, whether friends or enemies, poor or rich, is a necessary part of a good man's character. Let not the example of the highest in the land lead you to omit duty or break a precept. Remember that every man is bound to submission to the powers that be; to obedience to the laws of the land, when not absolutely contrary to God's Word. To quote Spinckes once more: "The Commandments may have as good martyrs as the Creed; for the same authority has required our obedience to the one that exacts our faith of the other." Remember that the two great temptations of the day are just those mentioned in the wonderful Book of Daniel—to bow down before the god of gold, and to fear the decrees and opinion of men more than the precepts and the judgments of God. And lastly, as God's blessing rested upon Daniel in this world, and was promised to him specially for the next, so to the true Christian the Saviour's blessing is assured both for time and eternity. God's decree, more firm than that of Medes and Persians, is: "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the Kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more *in this present time*, and *in the world to come* life everlasting."

Daniel

BY REV. ALEXANDER MAC EWEN, D.D.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed," etc.—Daniel vi. 10.

I have been much impressed lately with the benefit of reading at times a whole book of the Bible continuously, and without regarding the divisions of chapter and verse. If you will read in this way the Book of Daniel, you will not wonder at the hold which it takes of the mind in childhood and retains ever afterwards. What a noble simplicity there is in the character it describes! How fiery the trials to which he was exposed! How triumphantly he came forth from them all! His name means "God is my judge," and his whole life is a sermon upon that text.

I. PRINCIPLE IS THE CENTRAL POWER OF LIFE.

The principle which distinguishes morally between men is a conviction of the difference between right and wrong, ascertained on good grounds, and carried out in the details of life. The orderly irreproachable character of Daniel's behaviour in ordinary matters is remarkable. He had enemies who were eager to find out some inconsistency in his conduct, but "concerning the kingdom they could find none occasion or fault." He was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

Were this all we were told of Daniel, his case would not be very noticeable. Many young people are without faults in minor matters, who are altogether to be blamed when tried by higher tests. But Daniel's conduct was guided by principle. This will become plain if we notice where he lived.—The habits of daily devotion, as exemplified by a devout Israelite in his native land, were not astonishing; but Daniel was far away from the beautiful house where his fathers had worshipped. His neighbours were pagans, and their scoffing jests and unrestrained licentiousness were at variance both with the profession and the practice of a godly life. Is it well to note the way in which Daniel's principle faced such dangers. We find express mention of his severe temperance; for "he refused the portion of meat from the king's table and the wine he drank." We also hear of his familiarity with the Word of God; for "he understood by books the number of years which He was to accomplish in the desolations in Jerusalem." Thus we learn from his example to abstain from those fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and likewise to imbibe the spirit of that Divine Book which points to a better and everlasting life.

Mark also how Daniel was occupied.—The common excuse for the neglect of religious duties, that men have no time for them, is strikingly refuted by the instance before us. Can we conceive a situation better fitted to justify the plea than this? He was first of three presidents who inspected the accounts of a hundred and twenty princes set over the vast country of Persia. And yet, diligent, as he was in business, he found time to pray to God three times a day.

Then look at what he was threatened with.—Although the contrivers of this edict apparently knew that Daniel would not be deterred from the worship of God by the prospect of a horrible death, we are not to fancy that the threat had no terrors for him. Principle must have had a strong hold of his heart to enable him to resist his fears. There were so many loopholes by which a less resolute heart might have escaped the danger. He might have sought some obscure corner to worship God without detection; or he might have prayed inwardly to Him Who seeth in secret; or shut his window and thus escaped notice. But no; he had counted the cost; having made a covenant with the Lord, he could not turn back; "and his windows being open towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, as he did aforetime."

Seldom is a situation outwardly so sublime; but we greatly err if we forget that there are parallels to it on every side of us. If there are no lions' dens for us, there are the snares of business and the power of fashion and the fear of the world's laugh. When you are tempted to do what is dishonest over the counter or at your desk or on 'Change; when the regard for the usages of society endangers your fidelity to God or man; when the dread of some taunt or jeer is ready to deter you from your religious consistency—you are as really on trial before the Most High, as Daniel was that day when his foes gathered round him. Young man, be strong in God! In His eye there

is nothing great and nothing little, except in the light of the principle which actuates it. As each night closes around us in our cheerful homes, let us not forget to pray for all such as are exposed to sin, to craft, and to the wiles and assaults of the devil, remembering that when no sight of terror is seen, and no word of warning heard, the saddest and most serious of all tragedies are being enacted at our doors.

II. PRINCIPLE IS NOURISHED BY HABITS OF DEVOTION.

His case not only enforces the duty of prayer, but explains its nature, and in every aspect in which we look at him as he prays, we are instructed by the sight.

See what we learn about the manner of prayer. The fact that Daniel's window was open towards Jerusalem is to be accounted for by reading Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. In that prayer the sins of the Jews and their captivity were anticipated, and they were enjoined to pray in exile "towards the land which God gave unto their fathers, towards the city which He had chosen and the house built for His name."

To pray as Daniel did, we must retire. There must be a concentration of thought, a withdrawal from other occupations, a raising of desire Heavenwards. Meditation, the mother of devotion, is the daughter of retirement. Those who do not think cannot pray, and those who do not retire can neither think nor pray.

It is expressly mentioned that Daniel was on his knees. The question of posture in prayer is of importance, only in so far as it affects the spirit in which we pray. As acceptable prayer may be offered by man when lying or standing or walking, as when kneeling; nevertheless, for habitual prayer, that way is best which is most helpful to our devotions. We would see to it, first, that the body distresses the mind as little as possible; for it is plain that we must not tempt ourselves, by praying in an attitude which tends to make us restless and careless. Secondly, our posture should be reverential, and express the nature of those feelings by which all true prayer is imbued. Daniel knelt, and so expressed his awe in the presence of the great Jehovah, his sense of need as a sinful creature, his earnestness in desiring the blessings which he asked, and his lively hope of a gracious answer.

We notice the frequency of Daniel's prayers. Doubtless the "three times a day" were morning, noon, and night. Nature herself seems to indicate the prayer of morning and evening sacrifice. Each day when we wake to the light of the sun, we seem to see a new creation beckoning us to adore its Creator; and when again at night we close our eyes to sleep, it appears most natural to commend our spirits into His keeping Who seeth in the darkness as in the light. To these ordinary seasons of devotion Daniel added a third, and it was then, probably, that this great triumph was achieved. There is, however, no rule universally binding. Our hours of prayer are not so much fixed business habits as, in the beautiful language of the poet, "linked each to each by natural piety." But let us not abuse our Christian liberty. We shall inherit the spirit of godly men, when we follow their example. Blessed are they who begin and spend and end the day in God, who lift up their soul to Heaven with the first breath of morning, whose faith is strengthened and refreshed through the day by some upward glances to the Throne, and whose sleep is sweet, because their pillow is like the stone on which Jacob lay at Luz, and which he called Bethel because Heaven was open to him there.

We can gather the matter of Daniel's prayer. In so far as it consisted of supplication, we easily imagine what he would pray for. He addressed God as "his God." In that name was contained the assurance of strength to do and bear, to be faithful to the God of his fathers in that heathen land, and to endure a great fight of afflictions should that be needful. Is not this the matter of all true prayer, asking from the Hearer of it mercy to pardon and grace to help us in our time of need? True, prayer may say most by saying least. Times come when man's sense of need and danger is so deep that he can only cry, "Lord, save me, I perish." Yet these prayers are not despised because they are short and broken: they are of God's own teaching, for we learn them by His Spirit, "that helpeth our infirmities." Let the young remember this truth when their principles are threatened. There may seem to be an awful peculiarity in their temptations and a pitiable weakness in their resistance; but God has only to hear their voice, and, like the mother who hastens at her infant's first cry, He will incline His ear, and "bring them up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay; He will put their feet upon a rock and establish their goings."

Then, finally, how instructive it is to learn that Daniel gave thanks! Jerusalem was

in ruins; the people were scattered; distress and danger were in view. Yet, even then and there, he knew what cause he had to be grateful to God, and he could not pray without giving thanks. No saint can refuse to share in that sentiment. Such is our demerit and such are His mercies, so far is our lot superior to our deserts, that we may well adopt the Psalmist's resolution, "I will give thanks to the Lord; His praise shall be in my mouth." Nor is this a merely sentimental avowal. Is there one of the worst used of God's servants who would for a moment change places with his persecutors, who would not sooner be in the lions' den through constancy to the truth than at its mouth through treachery and malice? Rather than be Felix trembling on his throne, let us be with Paul in chains; for he knew no other fear than the fear of God. Rather than the world's deceitful calm, give me the storm which is of God's sending. I would not choose, any more than the Apostle, tribulation or distress or persecution; and yet, like him, I can see cause for grateful exultation if I can say, "I am persuaded that neither height nor depth, nor principalities nor powers, nor any other creature can separate me from the love of Christ."

Daniel

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed," etc.—*Daniel vi. 10.*

Daniel had been exalted to very great worldly prosperity, but his soul had prospered too. He was, we are told, a man of an excellent spirit, and a man abundant in prayer; hence his head was not turned by his elevation, but the Lord fulfilled in him His promise to "make His servants' feet like hinds' feet, that they may stand upon their high places." Yet, although Daniel preserved his integrity, he did not find a position of greatness to be one of rest. As the birds peck at the ripest fruit, so his envious enemies assailed him; and as the most conspicuous warriors most attract the arrows of the foe, so the honours of Daniel brought upon him the enmities of many.

The example of Daniel I present for your observation to-day, believing that these are times when we need to be as firm and resolute as he, and that at any rate, occasions will come to every one of us before we win our crown, when we shall need to put our foot down firmly, and be steadfast and unflinching for the Lord and his truth.

I. DANIEL'S HABITUAL DEVOTION: it is worthy of our study. We might never have known of it if he had not been so sorely tried, but fire reveals the hidden gold.

Daniel's habitual devotion. We are told that aforetime, before the trial, he had been in the constant habit of prayer. *He prayed much.*

Daniel always had subjects for prayer and reasons for prayer. He prayed for himself that in his eminent position he might not be uplifted with pride, might not be taken in the snares of those who envied him, might not be permitted to fall into the usual oppressions and dishonesties of Eastern rulers. He prayed for his people. He saw many of the house of Judah who were not in such prosperous circumstances as himself. He remembered those who were in bonds, as being bound with them. Those who were bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, he brought in the arms of faith before his God. He interceded for Jerusalem. It grieved him that the city was laid waste, that still the brand of the Chaldean destroyer was upon Mount Zion, so beautiful, and once the joy of the whole earth. He pleaded for the return from the captivity, which he knew was ordained of his God. He prayed for the glory of his God, that the day might come when the idols should be utterly abolished, and when the whole earth should know that Jehovah ruleth in Heaven, and among the sons of men. It would have been a delightful thing to have listened at the key-hole of Daniel's closet, and to have heard the mighty intercessions which went up to the Lord God of Hosts.

We read next, that with all his prayers he mingled *thanksgiving*. Do observe it, for so many forget this, "He prayed and gave thanks to God." Surely, it is poor devotion which is always asking, and never returning its gratitude! Am I to live upon the bounty of God, and never to thank Him for what I receive? Surely, prayers in which there is no thanksgiving are selfish things: they rob God; and will a man rob God—rob God even in his prayers—and yet expect that his prayers should be successful?

It is worthy of notice, that the text says, "Daniel prayed and gave thanks *before his*

God." This enters into the very soul of prayer—this getting before God. O brethren, do you not often catch yourselves praying to the wind, and in private uttering words as though you were only to be heard by the four walls which bound your little room? But prayer, when it is right, comes before God, in realising the majesty of the Throne of His Grace, and seeing the blood of the eternal covenant sprinkled thereon; in discerning that God is gazing right through you, reading every thought and interpreting every desire; in feeling that you yourself are speaking into the ear of God, and are now, as it were,

"Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,
And lost in His immensity."

This is praying, when we draw near to God. I shall not care if you do not use a single word, if you feel the majesty of God to be so overwhelming that words are out of place; and silence becomes far more expressive when you bow with sobs, and tears, and groanings that cannot be uttered. That is the prayer which wins its suit of God, and is dear to the majesty of Heaven. Thus Daniel prayed and gave thanks, not before men to be seen of them, nor yet in private before himself to satisfy his conscience, but "before God," of Whom he had an audience thrice each day.

That little word "*his*" I must not let slip, however. He prayed and gave thanks before *his* God. He spake not to God merely as God Who might belong to any man and every man, but unto *his* God, Whom he had espoused by a solemn determination that he would not turn aside from His service, that determination having resulted from God's having determined to select him and to make him His own man, peculiarly set apart unto His own praise. "*His* God." Why, it seems to me to bring up that word "covenant"—his "covenant God," as though he had entered into covenant with God according to the language of the Most High, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." True son of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, was this Daniel when he looked upon God as being his own, his property, could claim Him, could say as we sometimes sing in that sweet psalm, "Yea, mine own God is He!" Oh, to feel that the Lord belongs wholly to me! *My* God, *my* God, if no other man can claim him; *my* Father, *my* Shepherd, *my* Friend, *my* Lord, and *my* God! Yes, here lies power in prayer, when a man can talk with God as his covenant God. That man cannot miss; every arrow sticks in the centre of the target when he pleads "before his God."

II. DANIEL'S ACTION UNDER TRIAL.

Observe with care what Daniel did. He made up his mind to act as he had done aforetime. Note how *quietly* he acted. He did not say to any of his enemies, "I mean to carry out my convictions." Not at all; he knew that talk was lost upon them, so he resorted to actions instead of words. He quietly went home when he found the law was passed—though grieved that such a thing was done—without a single word of repining or cavilling he sought his chamber. I do not find that he was at all distracted or disturbed. The words, "as he had done aforetime," seem to imply that he went upstairs as calmly as he had been accustomed to do. His servants would not have known from his behaviour that any law had been made. He always had gone at that hour to pray, and they could hear him pray just as earnestly as he ever had done. He was stayed on God, therefore continued at perfect peace.

Note again, how he acted unhesitatingly—*immediately*! He did not pause; he did not ask for time to consider what he should do. In matters of perilous duty, our first thoughts are best. When there is anything to be lost by religion, follow out the first thought of conscience, namely, "Do the right." Who needs to question where duty points the way? Where God commands, there is no room for reason to raise cavils. It must always be, in the end, the worst policy and the most injurious course to say or to do anything which is not strictly honest, strictly right, strictly obedient to the law of God. Remember this, and, like Daniel, go your way and do your duty, come what may of it.

You will observe also, that Daniel did not act under excitement, but *with a full knowledge of the result*. The record expressly hath it—"When Daniel knew that the writing was signed." Many people will do right in a hurry, and under strong excitement will go further than they would have done in cold blood; but Daniel, probably shut out from the council by some crafty device of the counsellors, no sooner heard that the statute stood good than, without parley, his resolution was formed and his mind made up. It was not for him to delay and to hesitate; he had all the data before him, and obedience made her determination known. Count the cost, young man, before you

profess to be a Christian; do not espouse, upon a sudden, an enterprise for which you will be unequal. Devote yourselves to the Lord your God by His grace, but let it be according to the command of Christ, after having first made an estimate of the heat which will be required of you, and seek grace from on high that you may accomplish what otherwise will be impossible.

III. THE SECRET SUPPORT OF DANIEL.

There was something in the man which gave him this backbone; there was a secret something which made him so magnanimous. What was it? It resulted from several things. It sprang from the fact that *Daniel's religion was not the offspring of passion, but of deep-seated principle.*

You will notice that, after this long drought which we have had the flowers in our gardens are drooping much, but the forest trees are as verdant as if showers had been falling every day in the week. Is not this because they strike their roots deeper in the soil, and suck nourishment from provision which is not exhausted by the heat of the sun? So there are some men whose religion is like the flower which lives upon the surface—they soon dry up when the sun of persecution burns; but there are others who, like the forest trees, send down their roots into the deep soil of principle, who know what they know, have learned thoroughly what they have learned, and hold fast what they have received, and these, in the time of trial, are sustained by springs of secret grace, and their leaf is not withered. Because the Holy Ghost had inwrought into Daniel's spirit the principles of faith, he was sustained in the time of trial; but I doubt not that Daniel was also supported *by what he had read of the works of God* in the olden times. He was a great searcher of books, and he had found that in olden times Jehovah was always victorious. The Prophet's eye gleamed as he thought of Pharaoh and the Red Sea, as he remembered Og, king of Bashan, and the brooks of Arnon, and as his mind flew on to Sennacherib and the hook put into leviathan's jaws to turn him back by the way he came. Recollecting the works of the Lord, for which his spirit made diligent search, he felt quite certain that the living God would prove Himself true to His own.

Besides, the Prophet's spirit was sustained *by what he had himself seen.* He had been brought in close contact with the three holy children who were brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Where Daniel was at that time we do not precisely know, but he must have been well aware of that heroic deed. He had seen king Nebuchadnezzar defied, had beheld the Son of God walking in the furnace with the three heroes, and had seen them come forth with not so much as the smell of fire passed upon them: here was grand encouragement. Besides, *Daniel had personal experience of his God.* He stood before Nebuchadnezzar to tell him the dream, and the interpretation thereof; yea, on a yet more dread occasion, without fear and trembling, he had faced the king Belshazzar, when the thousands of his guests were shouting to their gods, and the king and his wives and concubines in gorgeous state were drinking wine out of the bowls consecrated to Jehovah. The lone man stood erect amid the ribald crew, and pointing to the mysterious letters, read the terrible sentence, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," a monarch's doom proclaimed in his presence by a man unarmed! Was such a one likely now to be afraid! He that trembled not before tens of thousands of fierce soldiery, shall he fear now, when nothing but lions are in his way? Not he. He had looked into the face of his God, and would not fear the face of a lion; Jehovah had overshadowed him, and the den into which he would be cast had nothing in it terrible to him. His own experience helped to strengthen him. He had this conviction, that God could deliver him, and that if God did not deliver him, yet still such was *his love to the God of Israel* that he would be content to give himself to die. It is blessed to have such a confidence as this. You good people who are tried, and who may expect to be tried yet more, you will never stand unless you come to this: "God can deliver me: but if He does not deliver me, still I am content to be a sacrifice for Jesus' sake." Ah! some of you would fain be Christians, but in the time of trial you give it up; like the fresh-water sailor, who, seeing the ship decked with all her colours, and her fair white sails bellying to the wind, thinks it must be a fine thing to be a mariner, but he is not far out to sea before qualms have come upon him; he dreads the storm, and vows "If I can but once get safe to shore, I have done with sailing for ever." Many have said, "We will follow the Lord with Daniel." Yes, and well-content they are to be with Daniel at Shushan, in the king's palace, but when it comes to the lions' den, then, "Daniel, good-bye,"

Take heed to yourselves that ye be not deceived with a fair profession which shall afterwards fail you. Daniel failed not, because his love to his God rested deep in his inmost heart: it had become part and parcel of himself, and, sustained by the two hands of love and faith, he was graciously upborne over the rough and thorny places.

Daniel

BY REV. J. HILES HITCHENS, D.D.

"O Daniel, a man greatly beloved."—Daniel x. 11.

Daniel was born about 620 years B.C., during the reign of the pious monarch Josiah. He is supposed to have been of the blood-royal of Judah, and a native of Jerusalem. When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, Daniel was amongst others who were carried captive to Babylon. His exact age at the time of his arrival in Babylon is uncertain. Some affirm that he was only twelve years old, others that he was sixteen. It is very certain that he was quite a youth when he was exposed to the luxury, levity, and licentiousness of the wicked city. He was selected for the office of page or personal attendant upon the Babylonish monarch, and, according to the practice which is continued still in the service of the Sultan, he received a new name. "Daniel" was changed into the Chaldean name "Belteshazzar"—which signifies "the man for whom Bel lays up secret treasures." He was placed, with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, under the care of Ashpenaz, that he might receive that training necessary for an Oriental courtier. Very early in life he had embraced the religion of his fathers, and lived in conformity to its hallowed principles. Those principles were soon severely tested after he reached Babylon. It was customary for the persons who were being trained for the king's service to feast upon the bounties of the royal table, so that their appearance may be comely. Daniel, having learnt to practise temperance in eating and drinking, and not wishing to conform to the evil habits of the idolaters about him, declined the luxuries which were provided. He ultimately obtained permission to live upon pulse and water for ten days as an experiment, and when at the expiration of that time there was no diminution of health, vigour, and beauty, he was allowed permanently to decline the king's meat and wine and adhere to his own simple food. During their term of instruction the four Hebrew exiles made marked and satisfactory progress in all their branches of learning. But chief amongst them was Daniel. Special endowments were bestowed upon him. He "had understanding in all visions and dreams." After the lapse of three years, devoted to the course of discipline, Daniel was introduced to the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and proved himself, as a counsellor, far superior to all the wise men by whom the monarch was surrounded. He had not served the king long before his life was jeopardised by the tyrannical decree of the troubled monarch. Nebuchadnezzar was perplexed by a dream, of which both the substance and the meaning had passed from his mind, and he decreed that unless some of the wise men of his kingdom disclosed the dream and the interpretation thereof, all the wise men of Babylon should be destroyed. The state of things being known to Daniel, he submitted the matter in prayer to the Allwise God. Light from the eternal throne was given him, and he was enabled to lay the particulars of the monarch's dream and its meaning before his royal master. The result was that he was elevated to the governorship of the province of Babylon, and his honours and riches accumulated. This position of prosperity and influence he enjoyed for many years, for there is a long gap in his history before we meet with him again. About twenty years must have passed away between his first advancement and his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. Faithful to his God, his monarch, and truth, Daniel earnestly warned and entreated the king. He laid before him the only way to acceptance with Heaven, and besought him to pursue the course which would secure his peace and well-being. Under the successor of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel seems to have passed a more private life. If he held any office at court it must have been a very subordinate one. His good services in the past were overlooked. His claims upon the esteem and reverence of those in authority were apparently denied. He was allowed to remain in the cold shade till he was again sadly needed.

The occasion which brought him prominently before the court and the nation in the reign of Belshazzar was the remarkable vision at the impious feast. In the fourth year of Belshazzar's reign, the king invited to his palace a thousand of his lords. All the luxuries which the East could produce were provided, and the festal board was laden with splendour. To add to the brilliancy of the display, the consecrated vessels of gold and silver, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple of Jerusalem, were brought into use—desecrated by polluted idolaters. Mirth ran high, for wine was abundant. But in the midst of the drunken revelry, the attention of the king was suddenly directed to the hand of an invisible being writing a few but mysterious words upon the wall. His thoughts troubled him; and the astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers were summoned to the banqueting hall. In vain they essayed to interpret the words, and terribly perplexed was Belshazzar. At the suggestion of the queen-mother, Daniel was called. We can imagine the calm dignity, the conscious moral superiority with which he entered that room, crowded with bewildered, lewd, and drunken men and women. We can discern the air of mingled pity and disgust which sat upon his expressive face as he looked upon the scene before him. His holy soul must have shrunk from the beast-like indulgence which was visible around him. Daniel was then an old man, and the proffers made him of rewards and honours were nought to him. He at once, with heroic nobility, proceeded to the task before him, and as he explained the mystic oracle he preached such a thrilling homily in the hearing of the excited king and courtiers as had never before fallen upon their ears. What were the feelings of the monarch, his princes, nobles, wives, and concubines, we cannot conceive. They had not long to interchange opinions concerning this strange interruption of their orgie. That very night the monarch was slain, Babylon was taken, and the kingdom divided.

Darius then became sovereign. He commenced his reign by dividing the kingdom into one hundred and twenty provinces. Over these he placed three presidents, or chief governors; and, having heard of the wisdom, experience, and ability of Daniel, Darius made him first among these presidents. Indeed, it is written, he "thought to set him over the whole realm." Honours always bring with them anxieties. Daniel was not long in the position of pre-eminence before the envious eyes of his subordinate officers were fastened upon him, with a view to detect, if they could, some flaw in his character and conduct. The princes and presidents leagued together to complain of him to the king if in his State avocation they could detect a fault. But they were compelled to own, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." With the utmost plausibility they induced Darius to pass a law forbidding any person in the realm offering a petition to any god or man except the king. This statute was to have relation to the period of thirty days from a given date, and the penalty attached to the violation of the law was that the offender should be cast into a den of lions. Daniel heard all this, and knew full well what was the design of such a law, and who were the prime movers in its introduction. But his conscience wavered not. His heart was open toward God, as the window of his chamber stood open towards Jerusalem. Not for all the lions of the forest would he deny the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." The authority of an earthly monarch was nothing when it stood in manifest opposition to the supreme authority of the King of kings. Hence, with calm consistency, with undeviating regularity, and with no cowardly privacy, Daniel still prayed three times a day. The result was his being speedily arraigned before the king. The execution of the law was rigorously insisted upon by the presidents and princes, and Daniel was cast into the lions' den. How Heaven interposed on his behalf—how the night spent in the company of the ferocious lions was a night of safety; how, in the morning, the king visited the den, and ordered the immediate release of the Prophet; how Daniel uttered not one word of reproach concerning his enemies; how those who united to seek his destruction were themselves destroyed—we have all been told, again and again. The romantic and exciting narrative has charmed us from our childhood. Daniel was once more raised to honour, and spent the remainder of his days in seeking the return of the exiles to their own country, and in receiving and recording the visions which are preserved in the Sacred Book.

Of the closing days of Daniel's life we know nothing certainly. Josephus says, "He was so happy as to have strange revelations made to him, and those as to one of the greatest of the Prophets, insomuch that while he was alive he had the esteem

and applause both of kings and of the multitudes, and now he is dead he retains a remembrance that will never fail." Holy, happy, honoured man of God! Thou hast passed away to thy rest. Would that we could do justice to thy worth! This we would do—imitate thy pre-eminent piety, thy stirring principle, thine unconquerable faith, thine unshaken conscientiousness!

Brothers, I point to this sainted servant of the Lord, and I beg you note, particularly, the one conspicuous trait in his character—his conscientiousness. You will discover it in him when a youth, and you will trace it woven into his entire history. On his first arrival in Babylon it led him to make a bold stand against the luxurious indulgence of a heathen court. Many a young man placed in his position now would say, "It is a small matter whether I eat and drink of the same provisions as the king's court, and for the sake of not appearing singular or discourteous, I will quietly eat and drink what is laid before me." But Daniel did not so; he had scruples of conscience; he desired to keep his conscience tender and electrically quick, and so in this apparently small matter he formed a firm decision and adhered to it. It was by thus being careful in relation to the smaller obligations of life that he became heroic in the greater. On each of the three occasions that Daniel was summoned into the royal presence to interpret visions and signs, you know how faithfully he acted. Though it was his duty to pronounce a doom against a guilty monarch, he hesitated not to do it. He waited not to discuss the prudence of doing this or saying that. He conferred not with flesh and blood, but with unruffled dignity spake right out what duty compelled him to declare. So when the great trial of his life came, and the decree was made known to him which prohibited prayer to God, he did not have recourse to the subterfuge of inward prayer in order to escape death. With persevering consistency he drew nigh to God, as was his custom. He pursued the line which an enlightened conscience marked out for him, and left the results in the hand of the Eternal. Thus it was that Daniel was honoured of God and man. Every resolute adherence to godly principle rendered him more ready for the bright and beautiful revelations which he was favoured to receive and hand down to posterity.

Young men, I would to God I could foster in your minds a deeper longing after such a characteristic. Ay, I would that not you only, but all who hear me, coveted most earnestly this unspeakable precious gift. The quicker you begin to cultivate a rigid and undeviating attachment to the dictates of a devout and enlightened conscience, the better for you, for the Church, and for the world.

But let me caution you. Let me point out what conscientiousness in Daniel had to contend with, for the same difficulties will be found in your way.

Civil authority was against him. When as a youth he objected to the food, and determined not to "defile" himself, Ashpenaz intimated that it would be at the peril of his own life to allow the Hebrew exile exemption from the king's directions. So when the statute prohibiting prayer to God was issued, it came with the weight of the monarch's authority. But in neither instance was Daniel moved from his righteous purpose. Like his three Hebrew companions, who would not bow down to the gigantic golden idol which Nebuchadnezzar erected, Daniel made a bold and determined stand for liberty of conscience. Whilst willing to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, he was supremely anxious to render unto God the things that are God's. So, brethren, it may happen to you, as it has to very many in our day and generation, that civil authority may stand in the way of your conscientious action. In such a case we bid you seek strength from God and gallantly go forward. Draw a broad line of distinction between civil and spiritual claims, and let not the one trench upon the other. If any man, be he monarch or magistrate, require you to do what conscience tells you is opposed to the revealed will of Heaven, then remember the words of Peter and John, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." "We ought to obey God rather than man."

Friendly obligations were against Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was his benefactor. He most generously educated him for three years in princely style, and provided bountifully from his own royal board, and yet Daniel could not surrender the claims of conscience. Darius, too, had elevated the Prophet to the first place next his throne, and had given many indications of the royal favour; and yet Daniel would not submit to the decree. Ah, one of the most trying experiences of life to an ingenuous mind is to act counter to the wishes of those who have been kind and generous. Yet such seasons of painful

necessity are sometimes the lot of God's people. I have no doubt that Daniel felt it a trial to be obliged to oppose the wishes of these royal friends. I have no doubt that some said to him, "What, Daniel, are you so ungrateful to your benefactor as to decline to accede to his wish in so little a matter?" But conscience forbade Daniel's doing other than he did. The friendship of God was far better than that of man. He must do right, even at the sacrifice of friends. So, dear sirs, I doubt not but that in the course of your experience the obligations of friendship will be often arrayed against your conscience. Your companions will say to you, "Oh, don't say that; don't do that; you will alienate your best supporters. Have not A. and B. always befriended you? Are you not now very largely dependent upon them? It will be madness to thwart their wishes—suicidal to say 'No' to their requests." In such a case I beg you heed not the voice of the tempter. Rather hear the voice of the All-powerful One saying, "Them that honour Me I will honour." Dare to do the thing that conscience and God tell you is right at all consequences. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

Prevalence of custom was against Daniel. It was customary for all beneath the royal roof to partake of the king's meat and wine. It was a fact that throughout the kingdom of Darius men readily obeyed his decree. But this was not a satisfactory reason for compliance to the mind of Daniel. Some said then, as they say now, "Why should you affect to be better and wiser than others? Why should you stand alone? Surely you can fall in with what is the universal practice." But Daniel did not. He was

Faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful he
 Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
 Mistaken, unseduced, unterrified;
 His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal.
 Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
 Though single.

Let us imitate him. I beg you in all matters where truth, and conscience, and Christ are concerned, there dare to be singular, if need be—dare to be steadfast and immovable, even though alone. But in things in which no principle is involved—things that touch not conscience—you can afford, if you desire, to conform to the prevailing usages of society.

Then, also, the *prospect of punishment* was against Daniel. He at no time knew what would be the full consequences of his faithful discharge of duty, and when he obeyed not the law of Darius he saw clearly no alternative but the den of lions. But he rose superior to all earthly considerations. He preferred to die for God than live denying God. His eye of faith pierced, in its keen vision, beyond the clouds of present trial, and discerned the supernal glory that awaits the righteous. With the expectation of Divine commendation and eternal peace, he could endure for a little the opposition of the world and the agonies of death from the lions' clutch. The penalties to which you will be subjected for conscience sake are comparatively light—not worthy of being mentioned alongside of the sufferings God's people of old have endured. Can you exercise *no* self-denial? Is your religion of so little value to you that you cannot make some surrender to retain it? Is Christ so little loved and prized by you that you are not willing to submit to a brief season of discomfort for His sake? Are those noble and enduring principles for which martyrs have bled and died of so little importance that you will not risk some of your ease, indulgence, and wealth for their maintenance? I beseech you play the man! In these days, when so few tribulations are allotted us, when the cross we have to carry is so light, and the sacrifices we have to make are so small, let us not be slow to exercise conscientiousness despite all difficulties. Forget not the words of the poet philosopher, Lucretius, who says, "The scourge, the executioner, the dungeon, the pitchy tunic, even though these be absent, yet the guilty mind with anticipating terror applies the goad and scorches with its blows." Though you may be spared the outward and terrible visitations which were the lot of many saints of old, yet if you will not live conscientiously—if you will not follow the spirit and letter of the law of Christ—you will have the stings of a condemning conscience here, and a sad, *sad* reckoning hereafter. Hark to the sweet,

soft, entreating voice of the Divine Master sounding down the centuries. "If a man will come after Me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

But think what is gained by a life of conscientious devotion to Jesus. The soul dwells in perpetual summer. The aromatic flowers of grace grow fairer and abound. The mind is sheltered from petty cares that hourly annoy the inconsistent man. The past presents no ghost-like forms of evil to scare, and the future is bright with the dawning of an eternal day of honour and happiness. The whole life is admired by onlookers because of the serene chastity and beauty it displays. The companionship of the "Prince of the kings of the earth" is daily enjoyed, and when the eyes close to things terrestrial, and the beatific glories of the other world burst upon the rapt vision, the memory of the conscientious man is blessed, his influence for good is abiding in all generations.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

BY RIGHT REV. HARVEY GOODWIN, D.D.

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered," etc.—Daniel iii. 16-18.

Consider the position in which these men were placed. They were, you will remember, three of the young Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar had brought captive from Judæa; Nebuchadnezzar had directed that certain of the most comely and promising of the Jewish youths should be chosen and should be brought into his palace, and there instructed in the learning and language of the Chaldeans; amongst these were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These four appear, from the first mention that is made of them, to have been peculiarly godly religious men; the captivity was to them a serious and heavy thing, beyond the mere personal inconvenience that it brought upon themselves; they saw in the captivity the punishment of their nation's sins, and it was little satisfaction therefore to them that they were chosen out to be fed with dainties in the king's palace; it was not to them a time to eat and drink and be of a merry heart and drive away care; was not Jerusalem trodden down, and God's sanctuary desecrated? and how could they rejoice and forget Jerusalem, and how could they feast themselves upon the gifts of him who had laid their country waste? Accordingly we find that Daniel and these other three refused to defile themselves, as it is said, with the portion of the king's meat and with the wine which he drank, and they nourished themselves with what to them was a more suitable diet, more suitable for men of a heavy heart while Jerusalem was trodden down. This is our first introduction to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and it manifestly marks them as men determined to hold that course which religion and their consciences dictated, whatever temptations there might be to the contrary. They shew themselves also to be wise and useful men in the conduct of affairs, and soon they are promoted by the king to places of trust and authority.

Now it was while Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were over the affairs of Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar bethought him of that monstrous exhibition of folly, of which we read in this chapter. He set up an enormous image of gold in the midst of a vast plain, and it was his pleasure that representatives should come from all the various provinces of his dominions to do honour to the setting up and dedication of this image. Was this a contrivance of some of the enemies of the Jewish rulers of provinces in order to get them into trouble? this seems very possible, and would be of a piece with the manner in which Daniel was afterwards involved in disobedience to the king by the cunning of his enemies. However we are not told that this was the case; possibly therefore the setting up of the image was a device of the king himself, and intended only to magnify his own greatness and gratify his pride. Anyhow the image was set up, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came with the rest of the governors of the provinces, but not to worship the king's image. And, as might be expected, they had enemies who reported their disobedience to the king; and the king was enraged, as it is quite certain that a man of his temper and in his situation would be; the notion of there being but one God to Whom worship was due, and of allegiance to that God being infinitely more import than allegiance to himself, was a notion altogether strange

to him: the golden image was *his* image, *he* had set it up, *he* had commanded all the people present to bow down before it, he knew of no religion beyond that, and therefore he was sure to take full vengeance upon any who might dispute his will. What I wish you to realize is the character of the king with whom these men had to do, the manner in which he was likely to regard their conduct, and the absolute helplessness of their condition before him, in order that you may rightly appreciate the spirit and courage of their reply to him. The king sends for them, he tells them that he will give them another opportunity of being obedient, that if they obey, well, if not they shall of a certainty be cast into the fiery furnace, and "who is that God," said the king, "who shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Now mark the reply of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They profess their faith before the king that their God is able to preserve them, and that He will preserve them, but they are not careful to discuss this point; because, whether or no, whether their God preserve them from the furnace or suffer them to be consumed in it, of this they are quite determined, that they will not break the command of their God by worshipping the golden image. This answer I think we can scarcely sufficiently admire; there is an independence of speech in it, which, when we consider the circumstances in which the speakers were placed, is only to be accounted for by supposing that their minds were thoroughly imbued with the thought that they were standing in a higher presence than that of Nebuchadnezzar; "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter"; not careful? why not? is not Nebuchadnezzar master of their fate? is not the furnace heated to receive them if they disobey? truly—but then they had in mind that there was Another to Whom their answer was really due; it signified little what answer they made to the king, the real question was what answer they should make to their own consciences and to God.

But it may be said, it is easy for people to be bold if they know that the fire will not hurt them. This however does not at all touch the real condition of the case; for, in the first place, it is not true that they were bold because they knew the fire could not touch them; just the reverse is the right order of things, the fire did not touch them because they were bold: it was not the impotence of the fire which gave them faith, but it was their faith which "quenched the violence of the fire"; the water supported S. Peter because he had faith, his faith did not rest on the waters but the waters on his faith, and when his faith gave way, then the waters gave way too and he began to sink.

But again, I do not think that it is true that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had any assurance that their faith would have this effect. For you will observe that they put two cases to the king: the king had insulted Jehovah, saying, what God shall deliver you out of my hands? they vindicate therefore the majesty of Jehovah; they say our God is able to protect us, if you burn us it will be because He permits you; anyhow we are sure that He will not forget us, and that He will watch over us for good; and we believe therefore that He will deliver us out of your hands. This is one case; then on the other hand, God perhaps might not deliver them, He might permit them to be martyrs for Him as He has permitted many others; and if He should do so, what then? would this make it right to bow down to the image? was their covenant with God this—so long as all goes well with us in this world so long we will serve Thee, but if we get into trouble on account of religion then we will forsake Thee? was this to be a child of the promise, one of the chosen generation, the true seed of Abraham? It is evident that to reason thus would have been unworthy even of the lowest pretender to true religion; these men had the law of God written in their hearts, and that law said, "Thou shalt have none other Gods but Me"; there were no conditions about that law, no qualifications, and therefore the question of the furnace did not enter into the argument; were it heated ten thousand times as hot as usual, it could not change right into wrong nor wrong into right; it was a question between man and God which no fire could touch. And herein I think was the chief nobleness of the answer of these three men; it is this "*if not*," this readiness to meet the consequences, this counting of the cost, which so thoroughly elevates these Jewish youths and gives them as it were a place amongst Christian martyrs. They might almost seem to have listened to those words of Christ, with which He braced up the minds of His disciples to fight the battle of the faith, "Fear not them who can kill the body, and after that have no more

that they can do; but fear Him Who after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, fear Him."

Now it is very true that in this case God did protect His servants, and the king's rage was thwarted, and he was compelled to confess the greatness of God Whom he had despised; and therefore these three Jewish youths may teach us a lesson concerning the manner in which God will preserve His elect and make their faith and courage instrumental in bringing praise to His name. But this is not the view which I wish to take of the case; I desire rather to dwell upon the lessons which they teach us by their "*if not*"; I think that however useful they may be to us as examples of what faith will do in the way of quenching flames, they are still more useful as shewing us what a sense of duty will do, even when a fiery furnace stares us in the face. And I am the more disposed to take this view of the history, because it brings it more nearly home to our own daily lives; when the question arises, as it continually will arise in life, between what is right and what is pleasant, we may expect indeed that if we walk in the path of duty and holiness, we shall find it to be a way of pleasantness and a path of peace; but then we should always be prepared for the alternative, always ready for the "*if not*," always able to see that there may be good reasons why in God's providence religion and holiness may not appear to bring their own reward. Those words of the Prophet Habakuk are very apposite, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold; and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation"; here you have the true religious spirit; in general holiness brings its own reward, it makes the fig-tree to blossom and the vine to yield fruit, and makes a happy home and brings with it prosperity, but "*if not*"—a man is not to become an infidel, he is not to say, "I have tried religion and I find it does not answer, and now I will turn to the world," he is still to rejoice in God and to say, "though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." This is a doctrine, which, you will remember, Satan is represented in the Book of Job as not understanding, and it is all the more clearly divine and true, because Satan did not understand it; when the Lord said to him, "Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?" Satan answered and said, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face." This was Satan's view of religion, and it is the view which many disciples of Satan in the world have taken since; they think that men pretend to be religious, as long as it answers their purpose; but true religion is like that of Job, which, you will remember, quite foiled Satan; he could do nothing with it; Job had not feared God because he was rich, God had made him rich because he had feared Him; and therefore rich or not rich, in health or disease, the result was the same; God had given, God might take away; nothing could alter the one grand principle of human duty to love and fear God.

What I would have you then to see is this, that godliness having the promise of both worlds, the fear of God and the keeping of His commandments will *generally* bring happiness and prosperity and success; but "*if not*," still to fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man. Let us take a very homely example: we are brought up to believe the old maxim that "honesty is the best policy"; that is, that apart from all religious considerations the honest upright man will on the whole, in the long run, prosper most in the world; and this is very true as a general assertion; but a man, who is honest merely because he thinks he will gain by it, will (I apprehend) often find his honesty standing in his way; a man will perhaps sometimes find strict rules of honesty, of dealing with others as he would have them deal with him, rather an encumbrance, and I think that a man who has nothing but worldly advantage in his mind will be very apt to rid himself of the encumbrance; then on what true principle is honesty to be based? a man must be able to say, "it is *right*, it is according to the will of God, dishonesty is a work of the devil, of the father of lies, not a work of God or a fruit of the Spirit; then I will be true and just in all my dealings, because this is part of my duty to my neighbour; and I believe that I shall be the gainer by it, I believe that God will help me; but *if not* I will still do what is right, *if not* I will still

consult my duty and not my gain, *if not* I will wait patiently until God call me to judgment,—and shall I not be the gainer then?"

Take another instance: scrupulous religious conduct will in general and in the long run bring a reward to a man in this world; nothing can be more true than this, that godliness has the promise of this present world; the mind at ease, the respect which the religious man will gain from all those whose respect is worth having, even the advantage which he will have in pursuing his worldly occupations from steadiness of behaviour and honourable bearing, all these things and the like tend to throw the balance of worldly advantage decidedly on the religious side. But yet it is very easy to imagine cases, in which religion will seem to be a disadvantage; a young man may find that it cuts him off from a good deal of society which he might otherwise enjoy, and from many pleasures of which he might partake, and that it earns him many a sneer and sometimes makes him the mark for ridicule and perhaps for petty persecution, and in this way undeniably religious behaviour may sometimes embitter to a certain extent a young man's life; I have known cases in which it has been so. And in after years it may in like manner appear to stand in his way, it may form a sort of chain upon him, which may hinder his activity (as it were) compared with others. Well, put all this at the worst, let the fear of God be as great a drawback as it can be represented to be by those who fear Him not, still duty is duty and the fear of God is wisdom; still we must be ready to fall back upon the *if not* of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to say, "if God prosper us, well, *if not*, still we will serve Him." And those who do so will not repent of what they have done. Let us take the case of the Apostles as a very striking example; Christ promised them that those who left all for His sake should receive even in this present world houses and lands and wives and children and the rest; He added, "with persecution"; now the Apostles did leave all for Him, and what houses or lands did they receive? men who were made in the language of the Apostle "the offscouring of all things"; well then, you may say, Christ's promise failed, He promised and did not perform; be it so, but if such an accusation be brought against Christ, it must be by His own servants, who know His service, and not by others; search the records then of Apostolic experience, and confess it to be a marvellous truth, that throughout all the writings which have been left to us, there is not even the most distant hint of disappointment on the part of those who took upon themselves Christ's yoke; they had abundance of grief on other scores, but so far as their relations to Christ their Lord were concerned, their writings breathe no other spirit than that of continued gratitude to Him and testimony to the infinite benefits received from Him; so that we must suppose, that however figurative the promise of houses and lands might have been, it was not a delusive promise, they received a spiritual wealth as His disciples which was worth more than all they had lost, their life was "hid with Christ in God," they appeared to have lost all, whereas in fact all things were theirs. And looking for their reward thus they could not be deceived; but if they had fixed their minds upon those fancies of worldly thrones and kingdoms which brightened the infant days of their discipleship, would they not have been most cruelly disappointed, meeting with chains and prisons instead of sceptres and thrones? The fact is, that when their minds were enlightened by the Holy Spirit they prepared to do their work, and leave consequences and rewards in other hands; Christ had commissioned them to go and preach His Gospel and found His Church; perhaps He would protect them and be with them in the fiery furnace as He once was with those three Jewish youths, but *if not*, if they were appointed by their blood to sow the seed of a future Church; if they were to sow in tears that others might reap in joy, if they were to be the first in storming of the fortresses of sin and upon their bodies others were to pass over to victory, it was still as God willed it to be and it was right. Here we see worked out in all its fulness that principle of godliness which was preached by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in ancient times; a principle which it is easier to preach than to practise, but of which it may safely be said, that it is the only principle which is sufficiently deep laid and firm to bear the structure of a truly Christian life. All therefore that I would say to you is this, you have seen how the fear of God guided aright under the most trying circumstances three Jewish youths, who had not an hundredth part of the religious knowledge and the religious privileges which we enjoy; go then and do likewise, lest these ancient saints of God should rise up in the judgment to condemn you.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

BY REV. R. W. BURTON, M.A

*"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king," etc.—
Daniel iii. 16-18.*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, with Daniel, were selected out of the Jewish captives to grace the court of their conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. They were chosen for their personal and mental endowments from the rest of the captives. They were brought into the king's presence, and consulted by him in all emergencies; and in "all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." Finally, in consequence of Daniel's advancement to the highest post in the kingdom, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were set over the affairs of the province of Babylon."

But there was a price to be paid for all these honours and emoluments. And the temptation to which they were now subjected came to the Jewish captives in similar manner to that to which our Blessed Lord was subjected when Satan said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." For "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold . . . and set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon," and proclaimed in the ears of every inhabitant of his realm, that on pain of the most fearful of deaths they should worship the golden idol.

Now, if we consider the circumstances attending this mandate, we shall see the fierceness of the temptation by which the faith of the Jewish captives was tried. This costly idol was raised in the most conspicuous position within the king's dominions, and all the great ones of the land were summoned to the dedication, and amongst those thus summoned were three individuals, who owed their lives, their fortunes, their honours, to him who thus invited them. By every feeling of gratitude they were bound to yield obedience to the king. And was it meet that they should stand out alone against his proclamation, to which the great and the mighty and the wise of Babylon yielded a ready assent? They were bound by every feeling of humility, and constrained by the force of example, to yield submission. Connected with the worship of this image, there was every thing to attract the senses and excite the imagination. The unexampled richness of the scene, the vast assemblage bowed as one man at the bidding of the vast orchestra! And then to complete the temptation to an act of momentary apostacy, there was the burning fiery furnace at hand to receive that same hour the individual who should have the hardihood to refuse compliance.

Proof against all, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preferred death in all its horrors to idolatry. They refuse obedience to the king's command. Whereupon, being accused before Nebuchadnezzar, and summoned to his presence, they witness his rage and fury (fearful is the wrath of a king), and yet there is an opportunity given them to escape; and if it were possible to aggravate the temptation this was its climax: there was room for a compromise with conscience and with God. They had stood out against the king's command. They had shown Whom they thought worthy of honour, and now might they not have yielded to force, and rendered bodily homage to the idol, when it must have been evident their hearts and minds were opposed to any thing approaching unto real adoration? "Now," as much to say, there is room for your change of resolution—you have a brief space allowed you. "Now, if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well; but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

In the emphatic words of the text, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego give a verbal, as before they had given a practical, refusal to the king's command. Then giving full vent to his rage and fury, Nebuchadnezzar orders some of his strongest soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and by their hands these faithful ones, even unto death, are cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Pause we to wonder and adore! to wonder at the strength with which these martyrs were endued, and to adore that Being Who gave such power unto men.

Pause we likewise to contemplate an unparalleled (shall we say?) instance of human ferocity, which shows the depth of degradation to which sin and Satan have reduced a human being. Would to God, that this were a solitary instance on record of the lengths to which unbridled wickedness can go! Blessed be God, this is not a solitary instance of the faith and patience of saints tortured, and not accepting deliverance, for the sake of a good conscience and in testimony of the truth!

What was the support these Jewish martyrs experienced? How bare *they* up, who in later times went cheerfully to the stake for the truth? It was the presence of God—the presence of Him Who says to His people, “When thou passest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

The history before us relates that “Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake and said unto his counsellors, Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered, and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered, and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

What was the precise idea intended by Nebuchadnezzar to be conveyed in these last words admits of doubt. Some consider that he merely intended to denote some persons of dignity and beauty as present with the three martyrs. It is common among heathen writers of antiquity to apply the term God-born in such a sense. Some think that Nebuchadnezzar may have been instructed by Daniel to acknowledge this fourth person in the furnace to be no less than Christ. May it not be that, all-unconscious of the great truth himself, he was impelled to the utterance, even as Saul under the old dispensation, and Caiaphas and Pilate under the new, were prompted to do, although unconsciously, and without any desire on their parts to be the mouth-piece of the great Disposer of events?

Whatever may have been Nebuchadnezzar's meaning, it is abundantly clear to us that the Person Who was with the three martyrs in their extremity, was the very Son of God, Who thus, as on other occasions recorded in the Old Testament, gave a prelude to His final appearance as the Incarnate Son.

It is of importance that we should now consider this subject with some practical reference to ourselves. If we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our situation on earth resembles that of the three captives in Babylon.

We are exposed, as they were, to the most searching trials. The Christian's trials and temptations arise from the same sources as those from which the captives suffered, viz., the world's smiles, the world's frowns, and the world's example. We must be prepared in reference to these—forewarned is to a certain extent to be forearmed. If the world smile on us, it will be sure to exact some price for its favours—some compliance with its rule, some relaxation of ours, or rather of God's. It requires purpose of heart to withstand its allurements. How much more so when its example is continually before the favoured Christian's eye, and the smiling multitude beckon him to follow. It is so hard to go in opposition to kindness, and to what is externally attractive, and to what falls in so much with our natural inclinations. I do believe that the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was as much perilled when they stood in the royal presence honoured men, and when they beheld the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, and all the people, doing homage to the golden idol which Nebuchadnezzar had set up, as when they were threatened with and ultimately endured the fiery furnace.

So that, without corporal suffering by fire entering into his calculation, St. Peter does not hesitate to speak of the Christian's trials as “fiery”; so searching, so penetrating do they often prove. He speaks of Christians “being in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of their faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

He says to Christians, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.” It is the will of God that His chosen ones should be thus tried, in order that His own supporting arm should be the more manifest and the reality of their faith evidenced, and that it should be seen, as in the case of Abraham on Mount Moriah, that man's extremity is God's opportunity. But if called to endure even such trials as fell to the lot of the three captives in Babylon, let their example stimulate and encourage. “If it be so,” said they, “our God Whom

we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Oh! that such an heart were in all who possess the truth! Oh! that in such times as these the spirit of these martyrs were manifested! That men would cease from bowing at the shrine of expediency or ambition, and rather suffer any loss than deny the truth.

Such men have arisen in this land. A Cranmer has gone to the stake, and submitted first to the flames the hand that once traced a recantation of the truth.

A monarch in later times has recorded his willingness to relinquish his crown and retire to a cottage, rather than do what he deemed contrary to the truth, and sacrifice to worldly policy and expediency the convictions of his conscience.

Such resolution may be branded by some as stubbornness; and doubtless there were those in Babylon who thus felt in reference to the religious devotion of the three children. But what availed the unbelievers' sneers? How soon the issue proved, not only the rectitude but the safety of the line of conduct which they could not before appreciate!

There was something more than a conviction of God's ability and willingness to save them which sustained the fortitude of those we have been speaking of in their trying position. Their faith, we know, quenched the violence of fire; but there was another motive within their breasts, and that was love. What else could have suggested the latter part of their reply, as contained in my text? They had asserted their belief in God's power to save, and their confidence that He would deliver, inspired them with hope, "*but if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

I conclude, then, that love came to the support of faith and hope. There was a three-fold cord to bind them to their allegiance, and it proved itself to be one not easily broken. Would we possess a kindred spirit to theirs, and rise as they did, superior to keenest trials? We must be possessors of faith and hope and love, we must therefore be something more than nominal Christians, if we would stand in the perilous and evil time. And such a time will come to us in some form or another. I wish not to throw a gloom over the Christian's path, to picture it as one of unmitigated difficulty. But it is written, "If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution."

If, then, called to suffer trial we cannot say that God has not prepared us for it, that it has come upon us without any intimation. It pleased the Father to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through suffering. And St. Peter does not hesitate to call upon Christians to "rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

BY REV. J. C. COGLAN, D.D.

"Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," etc.—*Daniel iii. 30.*

Whenever we hear of anyone's appointment to a Government place, the first question we ask is, How did he get it? generally, in order to ascertain whether or not we have at command any interest like that which has proved successful. And so it is interesting to enquire how these men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came to be promoted in the province of that Babylon which, after all, is not so unlike *this* Babylon. Of course we know how it came to pass, as we have read it over and over again. But let us try to place ourselves in the position of persons who did not know any more than the fact that they had been promoted; or, if you please, that, after having been invited to a religious act in which they could not conscientiously take part, the king who had invited them had promoted them. What would be your conjecture as to the way in which they obtained royal favour? I venture to say that you would at once make up your mind that the promotion had been the result of "trimming" of some kind, or of what is pleasantly called sensible and wise "compromise." Indeed, if I had to help in composing a dictionary suited to the present day, either in religion or

politics, I would write nothing after "principle" except "see compromise": and after "compromise" I would write "opposite of principle, which see." In short, every measure which promises to be anything is sure to be marred or even neutralised by some "wise" compromise; and any man who seems likely to be of real use is in a like danger. I see the spirit everywhere. The genius and the man of principle in politics is nowhere; except he be wanted to do work in a crisis. And, in the most worldly-wise Church on earth, the asserting diplomatist is everything and the argumentative genius is nothing. The one is laden with honours: the other is reserved for use, to be turned on and turned off according to circumstances. This is the Roman method; but we do very much the same ourselves. What we shall get by this, both in Church and State, is to my mind very clear. But I am not going to prophesy. I am speaking merely of principle as against compromise. And I say that if you knew no more than the (so to speak) "newspaper announcement" of the text, you, with your twentieth century knowledge, would not have accounted for the appointments as they are accounted for in the First Lesson which we have read this morning.

If you say, "The miracle made all the difference; let there be as much time-serving and compromise as you please in the present day; still, if anything like what we read in the chapter before us actually took place even now, no Government—Liberal or Conservative—could resist the claims of such men as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." Even admitting that, which I do not for a moment, I ask what caused the startling occurrence which you say would have established their claims and ensured their promotion? It did not come down from Heaven as something to mark its favourites, and to terrify the heathen monarch, and cause him to act in a conciliatory spirit towards the subjects of a superior power. No: what did it effect? This only as far as the king was concerned. It impressed upon him the character of the men with whom he had to deal. So that, transporting the whole occurrence into our own day, the miracle will not account for the royal favour; because the moral qualifications, according to the narrative, were the condition of the miracle. The deliverance called attention to and attested the character of these men; but it was the character thus attested which secured their promotion. Whether or not it would do so now, or whether or not modern Christian prime ministers of any party, or modern Christian constituencies are wiser, I am not concerned to discuss. I put it thus: Practically, the miracle does not touch the question; because, if I have two men before me for promotion in Church or State, both being equally qualified intellectually, and I proceed to decide according to their respective characters, and descide rightly that A has the spirit of a trimmer, and that B has the spirit of a martyr, how I came to form that judgment—whether by ordinary observation of character, or by something like the deliverance recorded in the First Lesson read this morning—in no wise touches the question as far as I am concerned. The patron of an office knows a man to be not only qualified, but thoroughly uncompromising; it is no matter *how* he knows it—by miracle or otherwise. We cannot escape, then, by saying that the miracle naturally produced an effect which in these days and without a miracle could not be expected. I do not want to underrate the effect of the miracle upon the king; but merely to urge the fact that the miracle drew his attention to moral qualities—to a certain kind of character—as possessed by these three men. And what I want you to do is this—not to set it all aside, because it happened long ago, or because there is miracle, and fiery furnace—not to say, "I don't believe in miracles"; but, taking the very lowest ground, and taking all as allegory, fable, or fairy tale, if you will—look, as a being with a conscience, at the whole story—at the three men represented as being miraculously delivered by Divine interposition, and so represented in what is known as Holy Writ, and say, what do you think of them, and how do you view their promotion?

To understand their characters we must, I think, get rid of the very prevalent idea that those who are spoken of with approval in the Bible were good as a matter of course, and breathed in and exhaled piety, virtue, and self-denial, in the ordinary course of things, and had a religious atmosphere around them which made it almost morally impossible to be bad; while, on the other hand, those who are condemned, being, by supposition, in the same atmosphere, are much more inexcusable than *we* should be for not being good! I cannot attempt to prove the absurdity of this notion: I can only remind you that it is absurd.

But besides getting rid of the idea that it was easy for these men to do as they did, I think that, in order to appreciate their character, we must try to ascertain how they

could have done otherwise—with a view to “promotion”—if they had lived in our own “enlightened” days. How could they have proceeded to reason with their consciences if they had had the advantage of our superior knowledge? They had many ways of escape. As loyal subjects, it was their duty to do what the king commanded; and of course this strong loyal feeling would be somewhat strengthened by the consideration of the alternative of the fire in the event of its repression! No one likes a fire when he is to be himself part of the fuel; and so, when Cranmer, for instance, has his faults exposed, I think that (against all accusations) we ought to remember that he went out to *be burned*, and to ask ourselves how we should like to do that? When you think of the fire an Archbishop leaves where he is not fuel, and then think of the fire to which he goes where he *is* fuel, you will have some idea of the aids to loyalty which such considerations will naturally supply to him. If you can both please your king and escape being burnt, the temptation, certainly, is to do both; and if you can think that you are acting in a self-denying spirit, inasmuch as you object to the image and only worship from a proper loyal feeling; you have really almost solved the insoluble, and contrived to “serve God and mammon,” and secured the crown of martyrdom without its cross! These men might, then, have reasoned themselves into compliance on the grounds that they ought to obey the powers that be; and their loyalty might have been stimulated and confirmed by the contemplation of the alternative furnace.

But setting aside the “loyalty” plea altogether, if they had consulted me as to how they had best manage their conscience in view of the objectionable furnace; I mean if they had consulted me as one whose *sole* business it was to *get* them out of the difficulty and keep them out of the fire, I should have said, “Look at it in this way; the whole thing is a ‘matter of form.’ Why should you be burnt for a form? Bow down with your body; that is nothing; you are not bowing down with your heart; that is everything.” If I had lived then, if I had been their “counsel” then, if they had taken my advice then, no doubt they would have escaped the fire. Not, indeed, as we read that they did escape it. No: nor should we have ever read of them, except perhaps in some list of men like Saul who was superior to “Form,” and offered sacrifice which he had no right to offer.

What would be the answer to this plea about mere form? Simply this: Form *is* nothing and heart *is* everything: but the association of ideas is such, with such beings as we are, that when a form becomes associated with an idea, it will be a matter of much time and labour to sever them. It may or it may not be worth either time or labour to sever the idea and the form in any given case: but the connection is indisputable. The British flag is so much woollen material, but if you insult it, you insult the great nation which is in idea associated with it. And so, if these men had there and then bowed down—no matter what was in their *heart*—they would simply have created a wrong impression, sacrificed principle, or, to put it in plainer words, *acted a lie*.

Again, they could have said that they might “cause a disturbance by disobeying the royal command,” and that as Jehovah’s servants they ought to “promote peace.” What is the answer? Certainly peace, but not at the price of principle.

Again, they might have said that “everyone was going,” and that they had better not be singular. I say, they might have said this, for it would be no *argument*. And looking for a practical answer in this eminently practical age, I should like to know how many of the reforms of various kinds of which we are all proud were brought about and worked by men who were not singular for many a long day.

But they might have had a still more subtle and refined reason for obedience. By this single compliance, they might have said in their hearts and said to one another, they should “conciliate” the king, and so be able to do him spiritual good afterwards! How delightful, as they looked at the fire—how delightful to think that by keeping judiciously out of it they should be giving evidence to themselves of a thoroughly “missionary spirit,” and all the while secretly thinking—not of their own bodies, but of his Majesty’s immortal soul.

All this casuistry they might have carried on with their consciences; and when the fire was made hotter, the power of such reasonings would have increased; and other arguments might have occurred to them, which do not occur now to you and to me, as we do not see the fire into which we are to be cast if we fail to conquer our consciences.

But, after all, the very best of their conceivable arguments would come to this. They must sum it up into this simple question, "Shall I do evil that good may come?" They said, "No." What was right they knew; what might be the result of doing it they did not know, and it was no concern of theirs. Obedience is our business. Its result, with all reverence I say it, is God's business. Our *next* step He generally makes plain enough. What future steps it may involve hereafter, He—most mercifully, I think—does not make clear. On the future He sheds no light. But "Thy word is a lantern unto my feet and a light unto my paths." To the question, Shall we do, then, evil that good may come? these men bravely answered, "No." They went further: they said that their God was able to deliver them, and that He "would deliver them." They went further still: they said that *whether He did or not*, they would not do what they believed to be wrong. This was their practical faith: and this must be ours, if we would have the form who walks with us in the midst of our fiery trials—whether seen or hidden—to be "the form of the Son of God."

These men were promoted to place: why? Because they had shown themselves to be "a power." And "a power" they would have been—in spite of Nebuchadnezzar and every other king who ever lived before or since, whether they got the places or not. Why? because against royalty, against public opinion, and in the face of death, they acted according to their conscience, and trusted to that God Whose candle within them they knew that conscience to be.

The alternative presented to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is essentially the same as that which presents itself often to everyone, high and low, young and old. We all have to face it, not once but ten thousand times in life. I ask my younger friends especially not to think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as mere names in a "Bible lesson!" I ask them to think of these men as examples in the smallest things of daily life: and to ask God to help them, as He helped these men, when urged to do what they believe to be wrong—no matter by whom—to say (and to act) "No."

Nebuchadnezzar

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"This is the interpretation, O king," etc.—Daniel iv. 24-26.

These verses contain Daniel's explanation of the remarkable dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The great tree which he saw in his dream meant the king himself; the hewing down of the tree meant that the king should be brought down from his high station, and driven from among men; and the rest of the dream about the stump being left in the earth, and being wetted with the dew of Heaven, was to be fulfilled by the kingdom being made sure to the king in the end, and by the treatment he was to meet with in the meantime. To tell a great and proud king such things about himself must have tried Daniel's faithfulness to the utmost; no wonder his thoughts troubled him, as the meaning of the dream dawned upon his mind.

But his faithfulness was shown yet further. He added a word of warning: "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility."

This warning however, it is plain, the king did not follow; for all came upon him exactly as it had been foretold. One day, twelve months after, as he walked in his palace in the pride of his heart, there came a voice from Heaven to the same effect as Daniel's prophecy, telling him that the kingdom was departed from him, and that he should be driven from among men.

"The same hour"—that is, probably, very soon, almost immediately—this was fulfilled. Evidently he lost his reason; went mad, as we should say; and, very likely, dangerously mad. He was dealt with in the barbarous manner of those times. He was driven from men and treated as a beast. The commonest comforts of life were now denied to him who had so lately had all that the world could give. He had no roof over his head, he fed with the cattle, his hairs grew like eagles' feathers, his nails like birds' claws.

In this miserable state he remained till seven *times*, probably seven *years*, had passed

over him—the time fixed in the dream and in the interpretation. Then came another change. His reason returned. But with returning reason came a further change. He was no longer the same man. His pride was brought down, he was now humble and submissive. He had learned to know God in His mighty power. Now he praised the King of Heaven; and now doubtless he no longer oppressed the people, as the words of Daniel seem to show he had done before. His kingdom was restored to him; his counsellors and lords came about him again; he was established in the kingdom, and became even greater than ever.

1. See here a picture of human pride, in its foolishness and stubbornness. Puffed up with the sense of his own greatness, Nebuchadnezzar forgot, disregarded, almost defied God, resisting His will and neglecting His warnings.

Pride is of various sorts, and is found in various ranks. It is not a sin of the *rich* only; one who is humble in station may yet be proud in heart. There is pride of rank, pride of riches, pride of learning, pride of skill, pride of strength, pride of fancied goodness. There is pride of *will*, that insists on having its own way; pride of *temper*, that will never let itself be found fault with, or own itself in the wrong. Pride takes a thousand different shapes; but it is pride still.

2. Pride is displeasing to God. While men did homage to Nebuchadnezzar, God was displeased with him. He knew his proud heart in all its most secret feelings, as well as in the words it prompted him to speak, and the things it led him to do.

Pride is *always* displeasing to God. He resists the proud, but gives grace or favour to the humble. He abases the proud, while He exalts the meek; He rebukes the proud, while He cheers and encourages the lowly; "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (and by the wise are meant there those who are *proud* in their wisdom), while He gives wisdom to those who lack it and ask of Him. So displeasing is pride to God, that it completely shuts out from His favour. We *must* be humbled, if we would share His blessing.

3. How easy is it to God to humble pride! See that proud king. He is at rest in his house, flourishing in his palace; he is, as it seems, walking on the roof; the city is spread out at his feet, vast and populous; as far as eye can reach, and far beyond, the country around is all his own. His authority is absolute; he has but to speak the word, and all obey him; his will is law. One word from God—and all is changed! His reason is taken from him; he is deprived of his throne, and driven from among men; he who so lately was treated as almost more than man, is now forced to live among the beasts. It was cruel and barbarous treatment; but it was in agreement with the customs of the age, and the men who treated him so were fulfilling the will of God though they did not know it.

In a moment, by a thousand different ways, God can bring down pride. By illness, by an accident, by a great loss, by means of some temptation allowed to come, or even through a *fall* into sin—by these or other ways, and either through the man's own fault, or by direct visitation of God, He can bring down the proud from his high station, humble him in the opinion of others and in his own, and show him what he really is, and how entirely subject to the power and will of God.

4. But we see here mercy mixed with judgment. In the dream, the stump of the tree was left in the earth; in its application, the king was told that his kingdom should be sure to him, when he should have learnt "that the Heavens do rule." Men thought perhaps, when they saw the king driven out from among men and treated as a beast, that he was done with for ever: but it was not so; God still had His eye upon him for good. Heavily as he was afflicted, let him but humble himself before God, and he would yet find mercy.

Even so does God still deal with men. In judgment He remembers mercy. He humbles, but does not at once destroy. Still He gives space for repentance.

5. In this case God gave a gracious end. "At the end of the days" Nebuchadnezzar lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and his understanding returned to him, and he blessed the Most High as the Lord of all. How different was his language now from what it had been in the days of his pride! Then he had walked on his palace-roof, and looked around him, and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" Now hear his words: "He doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?"

When the proud-hearted (whether the self-righteous or the worldly and careless) are brought to humble themselves before God, then only do they really come to their right mind. They were blind before, blinded by the god of this world, and possessed with its spirit; but now God by His Spirit has given them understanding, now true reason has come to them; they know themselves, and they know Him.

Happy is it, when the proud are thus brought to humble themselves before God, and to look to Him in Christ, casting aside all self-dependence, and trusting to be saved as *sinners* through His precious blood! This is wisdom indeed, true wisdom, Heavenly wisdom; this is reason and a right mind. Such a man looks back with wonder and shame on his past days of pride and folly, and gratefully *praises* God, while he humbles himself before Him. However painful the means by which he has been brought to a right mind, he does not regret them. Enough for him, that, whereas he was blind, now he sees.

Belshazzar—I.

BY VERY REV. R. PAYNE SMITH, D.D.

"Belshazzar the King."—Daniel v. 1.

We are living in an age when knowledge is so wonderfully multiplied, that scarcely is the ink of one statement dry before fresh records are discovered, giving us certainty where before we had conjecture only. And in almost every case this increased knowledge removes difficulties which sceptics had previously used for throwing doubt upon the accuracy of the Biblical record. They had made merry over the kingdom of the Hittites, so often mentioned in the earlier books of Holy Scripture. That kingdom has now come to light, and in the Egyptian records we find ample proof of its grandeur, and that the Hittites were a learned and civilized people, and so powerful that they contended on equal terms with the Pharaohs for supremacy in Western Asia. Equal ridicule was cast upon Elam, as if it were an invention of the Prophets. The cuneiform inscriptions confirm the accuracy of the prophetic declarations, by showing that Cyrus was actually king of Elam, and that Elam and Media were the conquerors of Babylon (Isa. xxi. 2). So here Belshazzar seemed to give a great triumph to the sceptic, who boldly asserted that there was no such king, and behold, now his history is gradually coming to light.

The difficulty about Belshazzar was this: the Babylonian empire survived the death of Nebuchadnezzar for scarcely a quarter of a century, and during that period profane history gives us the record of only four kings, Evil-Merodach, Neriglissar, Laborosoarchad and Nabonidus. It relates moreover the fall of Nabonidus, also called Labynetus, in such a way as to prove that he was not Belshazzar. For after being defeated in the open field, it describes him as throwing himself into the strong fortress of Borsippa, where he maintained his defence until some time after the fall of Babylon, but finally capitulated to Cyrus, who spared his life, and sent him into Carmania, where Abydenus says, but untruly, that he even became satrap. The cuneiform inscriptions have made it certain that Belshazzar not only existed, but that he was neither Evil-Merodach, as some have supposed, nor identical with Nabonidus, according to the arguments of others. Cylinders of Nabonidus have been found in which he prays for "Belshazzar (spelt Bel-sarasar), his eldest son, the offspring of his heart." But Mr. Rassam has discovered cylinders, which have been translated for us by Sir H. Rawlinson and Mr. Pinches, throwing great light upon the fall of Babylon.

In one of these, in which Nabonidus describes his restoration of various temples, repeated mention is made of "the king's son," as evidently a person of much importance; and it is very probable that Nabonidus, who was of royal descent, had married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar: who thus would be father or grandfather of Belshazzar, as described in verses 2 and 11. With this virtually agrees the statement of Herodotus, that there was a Labynetus, son of Labynetus and Nitocris, a Babylonian queen. The mistake is simply that of confusing the son with the father. Now whether Belshazzar ever bore his father's name is unknown to us, and though quite possible, yet it is more probable that Herodotus, who wrote at a distance, confused the stories which he heard. But the importance attached to Nitocris in his history confirms our belief that she was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. According to Herodotus

Labynetus (Nabonidus) was a successful ruler, and the builder of stately palaces and temples. The cylinders agree with this. Among other temples they especially mention his restoration of those at Haran and Sepharvaim; and they show that in the earlier part of his reign he even defeated Cyrus, and took Astyages prisoner, though doomed subsequently to fall beneath their attack. Herodotus had but a very general idea of Babylonian history, and knew nothing even of Nebuchadnezzar.

We now know that the son of Nabonidus was associated with his father in the government, and one cylinder gives the name of the last king of Babylon as Merodach-sarusar, wherein the name of Merodach seems substituted for that of Bel. As Belshazzar did nothing worth recording, and died ingloriously before his father, we could not expect more than these incidental references to him. But two of the cylinders discovered by Mr. Rassam detail the history of the capture of Babylon. Cyrus appears in them as a Persian by descent, but as actual king of Elam, and his success is represented as chiefly owing to the disaffection of Nabonidus' own subjects. As the result it is expressly said that he "entered Babylon without fighting," not by any such method as Herodotus describes, but apparently by treachery. Such a banquet as that given by Belshazzar would evidently offer a favourable opportunity for the city's betrayal. Nabonidus is described as endeavouring in vain to resist the advance of the Elamite army under Gobryas, the general of Cyrus, and as having fled away when Sippara opened its gates to the invaders without any attempt at defence. Some time after the surrender of Babylon Cyrus captures Nabonidus, and puts him in fetters and at some subsequent time "the king dies." Mr. Sayce by the king understands Nabonidus, but Mr. Deane, in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, supposes that it was Belshazzar, and that, as a great mourning is immediately described as having taken place for him at Accad, the scene of the events recorded in this chapter was not Babylon but Accad. But as Nabonidus is mentioned by name in the previous line, and as he was the supreme king, it is plain that he must be the person meant, and the public mourning for him at Accad, and the honourable burial accorded him by Cambyses, the son of Cyrus "in the temple of the Sceptre of the World," confirm the accounts given by the Greek historians of the merciful treatment he met with from Cyrus, though at his first capture thrown into fetters, and his death apparently was not by violence but from natural cause.

To sum then this matter up, these two cylinders which give us the account from Cyrus' side of his conquest of the Chaldean empire, and his capture of Babylon, show that Nabonidus made a brave defence in the open field, and that he fell owing to the disaffection of his subjects. They set Cyrus before us as fomenting this disaffection, which prevailed even among the Chaldeans and would be more general among those nations which, like the Jews, had been torn from their own countries, to dwell as strangers in the waste parts of the dominions of Nebuchadnezzar. As Babylon especially had a large portion of foreigners among its inhabitants, it is not surprising that like Sippara it surrendered itself to Cyrus without resistance; and if the Jews aided in this surrender, we have an additional reason for the conqueror's kindness to them, and for his restoration of them to their land. There does not seem to be in these two cylinders any direct reference to Belshazzar. Apparently he was a dissolute prince, and was content to trust in the strong walls of Babylon, while his father was making outside a vain but courageous defence. But there were enemies within the city, and encouraged by the defeat of Nabonidus, the malcontents made their own terms with Cyrus, who when admitted within the walls, treated them kindly and granted them peace. Probably while the banquet was going on the conspirators were gathered noiselessly round the youthful king, and put him to death before surrendering the city to the invaders. And having made no defence, and fallen thus ingloriously, there was nothing either in his life or death which merited mention at the hand of the chronicler of Cyrus' victories. Of Nabonidus it is expressly said that his capture was subsequent to the peaceful entry of Cyrus into Babylon.

Fresh documents will probably be found which will give us fuller information of the fall of Babylon; meanwhile these tablets of clay have given us contemporaneous proof that Nabonidus, Babylon's last king had a son, named Bel-sarusar; that as "the king's son" he held a place of high authority; that Babylon fell without resistance; and that Nabonidus was not at Babylon when it surrendered itself to Cyrus. Bearing these facts in mind we may now consider the inspired history.

"Belshazzar the king made a great feast." While his father was fighting for the throne, this youthful voluptuary gathers his nobles together for feasting. Secure within the massive walls of Babylon he cares little for the war raging without. For fourteen years Cyrus had been subjugating to his rule the vast regions which extend from the Euxine to the Persian Gulf, and he was now gathering his forces for the final campaign which was to make him the head of the second universal monarchy. Daniel, no doubt, when he entered the royal presence, and said, "God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it," bore in mind Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image whose "brightness was excellent, and its form terrible," but had any record of it been preserved in the royal house? Had they handed down any tradition even that Babylon, the head of gold, was to give place to a second universal monarchy, the breadth of whose dominions was typified by the breast of silver, and the two nations who shared the sovereignty by the wide-reaching arms? Probably we all only too readily forget warnings that are disagreeable to us, and Belshazzar, still surrounded by all the pomp and magnificence of an Oriental court, thought little of the dangers gathering round him, and full of confidence in the impregnable fortifications of his vast city, was too unobservant to discern, or try to remove, the discontent and ill-will that would so soon make the defenders of the brazen gates throw them open to the invader without an effort at defence.

Still we must not rate Belshazzar too meanly. If Nabonidus married Nitocris immediately upon his coming to the crown, Belshazzar would have been about fourteen years of age when he was first associated with his father in the government (cp. ch. viii. 1.) Surrounded by wise counsellors, and with the aid of his mother, Nitocris, he would not be too young for the office, especially in a climate where both mind and body develop more rapidly than in our colder regions. And evidently his father thought him quite capable of managing the internal affairs of the kingdom while he chose a soldier's life. For two years Nabonidus withstood the advance of the Elamite army, but even after his resistance had failed, and he was shut up in Borsippa, Belshazzar, now called to act as sole king, still made head against the invaders. There was evidently some vigour in his character, joined with voluptuousness, and but for treachery he might have foiled all Cyrus' attacks. Perhaps it was after some partial success that he made this banquet and "drank wine before the thousand."

This was in accordance with Oriental practice. The drinking began after the feast was over, and the king, seated at a separate table in front of his guests, set them the example of dissolute indulgence.

And as the wine mastered his better sense, "Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein."

Now this act may very probably have been suggested to Belshazzar by the known disaffection of the Jews. There can be little doubt that they would share fully in that dislike to the government of Nabonidus, to which Cyrus ascribes the comparative ease of his conquest of Babylonia. After Sippara had thrown open its gates to Gobryas, and Nabonidus had found himself unable to maintain his defence, the revolt of the whole country would rapidly follow; and though kept down by force at Babylon, Belshazzar, of course, knew that the Jews were among the most zealous of the friends of Cyrus, and when the wine began to inflame him it was an easy advance to insult and bravado. The phrase "tasting the wine" does not imply moderate drinking. As the entertainer, Belshazzar took the first sip of the wine provided for the banqueters, and then the carouse began. And as probably he sat down full of anger against the Jews, whose strong feelings of patriotism and their exclusive religion always made them stand apart from all heathen nations, there is nothing incredible in his thus commanding the holy vessels to be brought forth, though for seventy years they had remained unmoved in the temples, where they had been the objects of constant attention as a splendid trophy of war. Now there they had been regarded as holy; offered to Bel as a trophy of victory over the God of Jerusalem, they had been kept sacred, and applied to no profane use. But Belshazzar determines now to put them to unholy employment. Those Jews, so firm in their love to their country, so faithful to their God, forming a race so alien and separate and self-contained among the motley dwellers at Babylon, shall see their God disgraced, and the vessels which they regard with such heartfelt veneration shall be desecrated. The command is given, and it is done.

"The golden vessels taken out of the house of Elohim at Jerusalem are brought forth; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them."

The profanity added zest to the carousal. "They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

There is a grim severity in this long enumeration. They had gods of every conceivable material, but material gods only. They had gods of every sort, of gold and silver for the rich; of brass and iron for the middle classes; of wood and stone for the poor. But in one respect they were all alike. All were powerless. They had no breath in them.

There was, then, in this banquet, not voluptuousness only, but profanity. It had begun in sensuousness, and as with each draught of wine the flesh waxed more wanton, all better and reverent thought, and all sense of decency passed away. It made their pleasure more intense when in their enjoyment they could make poor jests about the God Who claimed to be the One God, the sole Ruler of Heaven and earth. And, as history so often witnesses, the intemperate revel, the coarse mockery, were but the precursors of sudden punishment. Wherever profanity and wantonness meet, it needs no inspired eye to see the hand writing its condemnation upon the wall. The eye of every thoughtful person can see it. Every mind taught by the examples of the past, trembles at the thought of the sure nearness of retribution. Above all must one, who believes in the rule of a just God, feel that such conduct must certainly be visited. Here it was visited: and we shall see the wonderful manner of the Divine retribution.

Belshazzar—II.

BY VERY REV. R. PAYNE SMITH, D.D.

"Belshazzar the King."—*Daniel v. 1.*

Our last homily was upon sacrilege. Close upon its commission came retribution. The festival that was to mock the God of Israel, and proclaim the triumph of man over Him Who made Heaven and earth, ends in man's discomfiture. The thousand lords cannot save their master. They had come to share in his impiety, and be witnesses of his bold effrontery. They see him pale and agitated; his knees smite one against another. All his strength has vanished; his pride is humbled. They behold in him a culprit, on whom sentence is being passed. He is weighed before them and found wanting, and his kingdom is taken from him, and given to his adversaries.

The very banquet that was to celebrate his triumph had aided in his downfall. Trusting to the mighty walls which his grandfather had built, he forgot that the empire won by force must be consolidated by justice, and that ramparts of brick could avail nothing against discontent and disaffection rankling within. And that very temper which could delight in this festival, prepared for the set purpose of showing therein his arrogance, and using words of boasting over a conquered people, is just the temper that urges even the weakest to resistance, and by the sharpness of its sting incites to stern reprisals.

Babylon was peopled by races torn from their native lands. With a powerful enemy outside the walls, these transplanted nations would naturally be restless and eager to throw off the yoke. Perhaps none were more restless than the Jews. A nation which can look back upon a noble history is always high-spirited. The men whose memories were stored with the exploits of Moses and Joshua, of Gideon, and Barak, and David: nay, who in their great heroes recognized men raised up by their God, and filled with His Spirit; such men would be ever on the look out for the appearance among them of a new Heaven-sent leader, and the remembrance of Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years would help to keep their minds high strung, and their hearts beating with expectation. How could such a race be ought else than restless and unquiet?

And the king at such a crisis insults them! And he does so in that possession which all earnest men will never endure to see insulted—in their religion. A man will bear much himself, but he will not bear insult to his wife and children. And those even who have borne the violation of their domestic rights have risen in anger

at sacrilege. The Israelites had probably borne of late many wrongs at Babylon. There had been years of anarchy when the weak have always much to suffer; and Daniel, who had been their powerful protector in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, had long been living in retirement, while others were at the head of affairs. When the king gave orders to bring forth and profane their sacred vessels, we may feel sure that this was no isolated act. Other wrongs and insults had gone before. It was no mere sudden ebullition of drunken folly. The Jews were suspected by him and disliked, and he had made them feel his anger. There is no reason to doubt the truth of Cyrus' assertion, that the empire of Babylon fell, not through his valour and skilfulness in war, but because of the disaffection of its own subjects. We can scarcely be wrong in considering that the Jews were fully as disaffected as any of the other motley tribes who had been brought against their will to Babylon; and Belshazzar no doubt knew that they were among the many who were hoping for his downfall, and he hated them for it. And he will remind them that they are a conquered race. He will gather round him his Chaldean lords, and will bring forth their sacred vessels and put them to unholy use. The act will bring back to memory that the house of their God lies desolate and in ruins. Nay, more. He will treat their God as one that has quite passed away, and their temple as a forgotten thing. For the vessels hitherto carefully preserved shall be put to common use, as things no longer worth any special notice or regard. Alike the God and the place to which they belonged may now be considered as blotted out of mind. Such an insult would sting them to the quick, and raise even the most timid to bitter vengeance. And with angry feelings all around, and men gnashing their teeth in indignation, the king calls away his officers from their posts, that they may spend the night in revelry.

Among those thousand lords must have been most of the men high in rank, and competent to see that the king's matters suffered no damage. Men whose keen eyes would have detected gathering mischief, and whose very presence would have kept the disaffected still. He bids them leave their posts, that their attendance at the banquet may give point to an insult, and make its barbs more irritating.

Such acts add nothing to a ruler's strength. Even those who take part in them secretly disapprove, and lose their confidence in the wisdom of their chief. And meanwhile the disaffected were left free to carry out their own plans. The carouse would give them the very opportunity they wanted. When the king and a thousand of his officers were indulging in the revel, it is not probable that sober watch and careful discipline would be maintained elsewhere.

The thoughtful at such times need no handwriting upon the wall to tell them that punishment is near. The pages of profane history are full of narratives which show that a night of revelry is constantly the precursor of the day of doom, that "vengeance as a lion lieth in wait for those that mock" (Ecclus. xxvii. 28). But one great use of Holy Scripture is that it shows us God's presence openly manifested in His dealings with human affairs. His hand is ever really present at all times, working in the events of this world, but it is wrapped about with clouds. Still no one can read history with care and not find the same lesson that is taught by Belshazzar's feast. The lives of Philip II. of Spain, of Louis XIV. of France, and of Napoleon, all teach it, as do those of myriads of meaner men; only God punished their pride and ambition by the sure though silent working of His ordinary laws, while here He gave a sign which clearly indicated that those laws are the ministers of His unchanging justice.

And so the handwriting upon the wall has passed into a proverb, and wherever we see pride and want of selfcontrol, we know that punishment is near; and in the self-willed acts which mark the climax of a presumptuous course, we see the handwriting which tells us that the man has reached the edge of the precipice, and that his next step will be utter ruin. And this principle is true in ordinary life, and in the fortunes of institutions quite as much as in that of despots and conquerors and statesmen. It is an old saying of the poet Hesiod that "the half is more than the whole," because by moderation and self-restraint we may keep the half, while we shall gain the whole only to see it wrested from us. Were one political party able to silence the rest, it would only fall thereby into more utter powerlessness. And so in the management of our own lives, our gifts become our bane instead of being our blessing, when we cannot control ourselves. We have the principle set before us in the life of the most active and highly gifted of the Apostles. For at the very

time when more than ordinary revelations were made to St. Paul, and he was even caught up into the third heaven, and heard things beyond the power of human language to utter, God at that very time placed a thorn in his flesh to buffet him. And Paul was restless and unhappy at so strange an impediment being placed in the way of his usefulness, but God revealed to him the secret—"My strength is made perfect in weakness." Place this Divine warning side by side with old Hesiod's aphorism, and in the one we have the lesson in the form of cold heathen philosophy, in the other is the warm, loving fulness of Christian truth. For the heathen sees man only as he is and by himself; Christianity shows him to us in his relation to God.

The words of the narrative are in agreement with modern discoveries. Mr. Layard, in describing the remains of palaces at Nineveh, speaks of several of them as having the wall covered with lime or plaster. And here in the full light, "over against the candlestick," in a spot illuminated by the glare from one of the massive candelabra, at the top of which was a bowl filled with oil, and in it a bundle of flax for a wick, blazing with large light, the fingers were seen, and in the expressive language of the original, "they are writing."

The king sees the fingers in motion, sees the letters traced one by one. As he started in terror, the eyes of the revellers looked at the spot on which his gaze was fixed, and the loud mirth and noisy revelry was silenced as in a moment. There was but one thought now, as with the king they watched "the part of the hand that wrote." It was not a whole hand, but simply "fingers of a man's hand," holding probably the iron pen or chisel with which letters were traced; and all were filled with awe at the thought of what might be their meaning. "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."

There is a swift transition from insolence to terror whenever the conscience is ill at ease. When Horace describes a man as standing fearless in the midst of the ruins of a dissolving world, he rightly says of him that he must be just. Vice can be vain and presumptuous, and in the hour of success will mock and utter words of scorn. Virtue alone can be calm and full of strength at all times, and bear prosperity without arrogance, and adversity without feebleness. Especially is virtue strong if it have for its foundation the Rock of Ages, and feel that God compasseth it about. The poor king here is as mean in his cowardness as he was arrogant in his insolence. His face a few minutes ago was flushed with wine and with pride. His colour now has fled. Pale and blanched, he can scarcely sit upright, for the joints of his body are relaxed, his knees smite together, and it seems as if he must sink down like one palsied or stricken with sudden torpor. Is this poor creature the mighty king who but a short while ago was defying the God of Heaven? who was insulting Jehovah and His people? Nay, is not every one who insults God as pitiable a sight? This stroke of terror has made Belshazzar's folly plain to human eyes; but man defying God is ever the picture of impotence vainly endeavouring to match itself with the calm majesty of omnipotence.

"The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the sooth-sayers. And the king spake and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then came in all the king's wise men; but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof."

Those who have a natural explanation ready for all miracles, suppose that as the king was drinking, his eye suddenly caught sight of some ancient bricks built into the wall, on which was some cuneiform writing, made visible by the strong light of the candelabrum; and that his guilty conscience supplied the rest, and made him think that he saw fingers actually tracing the words. But these "wise men" were well skilled in reading ancient writings, and we find that a large proportion of the works in the royal libraries were translations from older, and especially from Accadian books. Nor were these tiles or cylinders used for building materials, and had there been any inscription on the walls it would have been one in honour of the builder of the palace. Such words as Daniel read are utterly unlike any now found in the many literary treasures brought from Babylonia, nor was there any Assyrian alphabet

which these men could not have deciphered. But they come and scan the strange letters in vain. The writing may have been in the old Samaritan character, which the Jews used before the captivity, during which they learned the square letters now called Hebrew. While profoundly versed in all Assyrian knowledge, it is by no means probable that the Chaldeans cared to learn the alphabets of foreign nations; and such characters as those used, for instance, upon the Moabite stone, might have been outside their range of knowledge. But the writing, whatever it was, conveyed no idea to the minds of the wise men of Babylon, and Belshazzar, in growing agony and unendurable suspense, offers large rewards to the man who will allay his fears.

Dresses of honour, conveying special privileges to the wearers, were long a common form of reward in the East. Mordecai was invested in a robe of this same scarlet (Esth. xiii. 15), the purple of a reddish hue being the genuine dye, and more costly and brilliant than the violet purple, usually rendered in our version "blue." But besides this and the golden necklace, the fortunate interpreter of the writing was to be, not "the third ruler of the kingdom," but one of the three chief rulers of the kingdom. In Daniel ii. 49, we read of three chief rulers of the province of Babylon. Similarly there seem to have been three who were over the whole realm. But when Belshazzar made the offer his realm was sadly shrunken. It was bounded by the walls of one city, and all outside was in the power of an enemy against whom his father had striven bravely, but in vain.

But the promises avail nought. The wise men look and look in vain. The thousand lords all look, but the writing defies their efforts, and the king's despair grows more dark and gloomy. "Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished."

How changed the scene! There had been, at first, impiety and sacrilege. They drank in the holy vessels to the honour of their gods, and with light jest at Jehovah and bitter contempt of His people. And then as the carouse went on, there rose the sound of coarser revelry, and the tongue loosed by the wine from its ordinary restraint gave utterance to words of shameless blasphemy and ribald licence: and then came silence. Every eye was turned towards the bright space illuminated by the candlestick. What can those fingers be tracing? What can those characters mean? What message has come to them? They look towards the royal throne, but there is no comfort there. The king so lately defiant sits shrunken and doubled up, with terror making every limb to shake. The wise men come in. They gaze: they confer among themselves. There are four words, but in what language are they written? What is the writing? What the explanation? The king urges them on. Whoever can answer shall have honours of every sort, and the highest rank and power that a subject can attain to. They were clever enough to have invented a meaning: to have said that it meant victory, and Cyrus' downfall. But a secret power withheld them. They forego the coveted honours, and own that their boasted wisdom availed them nothing. So it is ever with mere human wisdom. The crisis comes, and it is weighed in the balance and found wanting.

And so ends the banquet. The thousand lords stand about in groups, their mirth over, with no appetite for merry jest. A giant terror has entered the hall of revelry, and every heart is weighed down with a burden of fear. In our next we shall see the Prophet inspired of God reading the mysterious writing, and explaining to the king that the hand-writing on the wall meant his own condemnation, and the overthrow of his realm and a scoffer's death.

Belshazzar—III.

BY VERY REV. R. PAYNE SMITH, D.D.

"Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords," etc.—Daniel v. 10-23.

The queen in this place was certainly the queen-mother, who in Oriental courts always holds a position of high rank. Where polygamy is the rule, a wife counts for little, but the mother of the reigning sovereign is sure of exercising great influence. We even find the office going on into the next reign; for Asa removes his grandmother Maachah, the wife of Abijam and daughter of Absalom, from being queen, because

she was given to idolatry. It thus appears that she held an official rank for life as well as her natural influence. And thus in Turkey the mother of the reigning sovereign is known as the Sultana Validah; and, apparently, throughout the East she occupied a definite position, with many privileges as well as those accorded her by the affection of her son. But if this queen-mother was Nitocris, she was personally a woman of great ability and power. As the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar she was the link between the reigning dynasty and the great founder of the Babylonian empire. Apparently, too, she had inherited some of the statesman-like qualities of her father, while her husband Nabonidus was little more than a soldier. She may thus have been the counsellor of her son, whose early elevation to rule was evidently the result of his representing through her the great king. Naturally, therefore, Belshazzar would look to her for aid, and he looks not in vain. She may even have come because the confused noise and exclamations of many voices reached her apartments. At all events, "by reason of the words of the king and his lords" means "because of their loud talking," though most probably some messenger brought her the account of what had happened, and told her of her son's distress, and that the wise men could do nothing to allay his terrors.

She comes, therefore, and says, "There is a man in the kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and showing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation."

Now here one or two difficulties have been made. For, first, it has been asked, Why, if Daniel was master of the magicians, had he not come in with them? But probably this title was rather a high rank conferred upon a political personage, than a practical matter of ordinary duty. Daniel had studied in the college of the Magi, had learned their wisdom, and by interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, had proved that he excelled his teachers; but he was forthwith entrusted with political power, and his duties became those of a secretary of state. He retained his rank as "Master of the Magi," and in great court ceremonials might appear at their head, but he practised none of their arts. He had higher and more important functions. And when at the death of Nebuchadnezzar, or upon the murder of Evil-Merodach, all political power passed from his hands, he would neither wish himself, nor would the ordinary Chaldean soothsayers desire, that he should actually interfere with their duties. His safety in troubled times, when usurper was struggling with usurper, would be to dwell quietly; but evidently he had the entire respect of Nitocris, and probably her protection.

But it is also asked, how it was that Belshazzar knew so little about him? Why did he not send for him himself? But, as we shall see, he had a general knowledge of him as one who had been in office under his grandfather; and a young Oriental despot was not so carefully educated as to know very much even of the history of the time immediately preceding his own. There was no one round him who would care to tell him much about the statesman who had done such good service in days gone by. When Neriglissar murdered the son of Nebuchadnezzar new men would come into power, and it was as much as the old ministers could expect if they were not put to death together with their master.

But Nitocris remembered with respect one who had served her father so well, and she dwells upon his merits, not because he was a person altogether unknown to Belshazzar, but because he was a Jew; and it could not but have been a humiliation to the king to have to send to a Jew for help, when the very purpose of the festival had been to insult that Jew's God. As it is, the form of Daniel's answer is not friendly, nor could Belshazzar have expected either respect or friendship. But, as Nitocris pointed out, Daniel was the one man who had the necessary skill, and the banquet prepared in mockery of the Jews, and to pour upon them scorn and insult, is hushed, that a Jew may interpret the message sent by Israel's God.

It was probably the fear of objection being made because of his nationality that caused Nitocris to dwell so fully on his wonderful power of interpreting dreams and solving riddles and explaining things difficult and uncertain. She even commends

him to her son by showing that his name was almost identical with the king's own. Both were "princes of Bel," and Daniel's Babylonian name would suggest that he was one of themselves, who had thrown in his lot with them. And so, though the king knew that he belonged to a suspected race, he yet makes no objection. Probably his anxiety to know the meaning of the strange words overcame all other misgivings.

"Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee." And then the king tells him how all the wise men of Babylon had tried to decipher the mysterious writing, and had failed, and repeats the offer of ample honours if Daniel can once again, as in old times, solve the perplexing difficulty.

The king evidently had some knowledge of Daniel. His connection with Nebuchadnezzar had been too remarkable for his name not to be from time to time upon the lips of men; but the events themselves told from mouth to mouth became probably so changed and altered as to be but myths and fables, which the people had shaped into accordance with their own ideas. A few years suffice for such changes, and Daniel probably lived at Babylon as one whom the people regarded with awe, as a being invested with extraordinary powers, and who had done marvellous things. And now, as again and again he had been called in to solve the mental difficulties of Nebuchadnezzar, he stands before the unworthy grandson, and hears his narrative, and looks reverently upon the writing still illuminated by the blazing light of the candlestick.

He sees at once its meaning, and will interpret it, but rejects decisively the gifts.

"Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation."

The purpose of this rejection of the royal gifts was not to vindicate Jewish prophecy from the charge of being venal. No such idea was present in the mind either of the king or of the nobles. Their one wish was to have the writing interpreted. We find afterwards that Daniel submitted to the wearing of the robe and chain of office, though he knew how worthless the gifts were. His present refusal was intended, first, to prepare the mind of Belshazzar for the boding of evil; and, secondly, as a reproof. The idea of some commentators that the king would immediately fall into a rage, and order Daniel to be punished, is without reason, nor need Daniel's words be softened down. They are too unlike those addressed to Nebuchadnezzar, when evil was impending over him, for us not to recognize the difference. As a matter of fact, in all despotisms free language is often addressed to the sovereign, and truth is spoken in a blunt way not usual in courts where behaviour is a matter of etiquette. The history of the Arab chalfis abounds in pointed sayings, that must have stung, but which it was the rule to bear. And here Daniel was one who had been the chief minister of the king's grandfather, and who, while refusing the king's gifts, was willing to do his pleasure, and set his mind at rest.

But Daniel would have been untrue to his high office if he had not reproved the king. His whole address is one of reproof and remonstrance. From first to last his words are stern, and such as might have moved the wrath of a despot; but had not that just happened which had crushed the king with terror? There is often even a relief in a small annoyance coming to divert the thoughts from a great calamity. Belshazzar had just seen the fingers writing their message upon the wall. He knew that it was a message of punishment from the God of Israel, Whose holy vessels he had just been profaning. He expected only words of woe and wrathful tidings from Israel's Prophet, and the rejection of his gifts was in harmony with his own secret thoughts.

And then Daniel recalls to mind the history of the strange humiliation which had befallen Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride. "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom and majesty and glory and honour: and for the majesty that He gave him, all people nations and languages trembled and feared before him; whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: and he was driven from the sons of men; and

his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of Heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appointeth over it whomsoever He will."

The history of Nebuchadnezzar's malady would be long remembered in the royal house, and be narrated, with such changes as are sure to accompany oral tradition, among the stories wherewith people who have no books while away their time. But no change could make it more startling than the simple facts, and Daniel magnifies Nebuchadnezzar's authority and dilates upon his grandeur to show that it was no common king who had suffered this humiliation. Belshazzar had not attained to such entire power as that wielded by his grandfather. Very probably there were with him one or more officers who represented Nabonidus, and as long as the father lived, there was a limit to the authority of the son. True, that they were now kept apart, and nobody within the walls of Babylon could vie with Belshazzar. But the presence of the enemy, the necessity of making resistance, the control of the army, the maintenance of its efficiency, and the prevalence of general disaffection, making all things more difficult, were so many limits of the king's power. Nebuchadnezzar had overcome all resistance, success had crowned his efforts, and difficulties had but proved his ability. Such a one could kill and keep alive; could set up and pull down. But wherever the monarch is not a person of high intellectual and moral ability, the presence of difficulties is apt to raise up some one, who, by the force of his nature, becomes predominant, and wields all real power.

Such may have been the case with the young king, but it was not so with Nebuchadnezzar. And yet when that grand monarch gave way to pride and arrogance, he suffered a reverse so marvellous and extraordinary, that the story of one so highly endowed, so strong in mind and will, giving way to the strangest hallucination, and roaming about lowing like the oxen and eating their food, and yet finally returning to his kingdom:—this, with the many minor events and anecdotes, which filled up the outline preserved to us in Holy Scripture, must have been repeated from father to son through many generations; and well was it if until it passed away it remained as a lesson against that sin which especially besets men high in rank and power.

There is one added particular not given in the fuller narrative, namely, that Nebuchadnezzar's "dwelling was with the wild asses." Now the wild ass is an animal difficult and almost impossible to tame, of great fleetness, wary and hard to approach, and whose home is in the desert. Living with them it would be no easy matter to approach Nebuchadnezzar; nor is it contrary to what has happened in other well authenticated cases, to believe that after a time a wild man would almost rival them in speed and certainly in endurance. At a distance, then, from the cultivated fields watered by the canals of Babylonia, far away in the deserts which border upon it, Nebuchadnezzar passed the seven years of his malady.

But how constantly is it the case that men know the words of a lesson but do not understand its meaning. Too often, not children only, but grown men, learn by rote, and can repeat the sounds, but the sense is hidden from them. Even religious men may read their Bibles times without number, and yet have seen only the casket which contains the jewel; until it may be some trial comes, some mental striving and searching of heart, and then some text, which they have repeated hundreds of times without any special meaning, is unlocked, and they find in it some deep lesson of strength and comfort, of which before they had been unaware. Widely apart are the two kinds of knowledge. Our intellects explain to us the outward form, the relations of the words, their grammatical import; it is when our hearts take them up that we learn their spiritual and Divine teaching. Belshazzar probably had often listened with curious interest to the story of his illustrious grandfather's malady, as it was repeated perhaps in the women's apartments in his childhood; and in riper years he may have read the proclamation which the penitent monarch published after being restored to his throne. But he listened as David had listened to Nathan's story of the ewe lamb; there was nothing to say to him, "Thou art the man." But the aged Prophet, speaking with all the weight of one who had been the counsellor of the great founder of the Babylonian empire, now drives the barbed arrow of reproof deep into his conscience. He repeats to him the history of Nebuchadnezzar's pride and punishment, and adds, "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven; and they have brought the vessels

of His house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in Whose hand thy breath is, and Whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

These are stern but faithful words, worthy of God's Prophet, and the remembrance of the terrible malady with which Daniel's God had smitten the most mighty monarch of his race must have repressed every rising of anger, and humbled the arrogance which, an hour or two ago, had been so rampant. It is a well-known rule that those who are insolent in prosperity are abject and mean when distress overtakes them. For the arrogance and the meanness are alike the oscillations of a mind destitute of self-control. The pendulum which goes farthest in one direction swings equally far upon the opposite side. Belshazzar was too much terrified by the apparition of the fingers writing his condemnation to dare say one word of remonstrance. In his pride he had defied God, but his pride is quelled, and he meekly listens as the Prophet rebukes him; tells him of knowledge unused, and of the warning, unheeded, of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment; stigmatizes as things void alike of sight and hearing and sense his idols of silver and wood and stone; and warns him that the God against Whom he had lifted himself up was the God in Whose hand was his very breath, and Who had the control of all his ways.

Well would it be if we would each one learn the lesson of bowing in humble obedience to God's will from these examples of old, instead of having it forced upon us by personal suffering. Or rather, as Christians, it is our duty to bend to the Divine will in loving trustfulness as being the will of our Father Who is in Heaven. Too often men will learn nothing except by their own experience, and it is only when battered and bruised by vain striving, and humbled by disappointment and failure, that man's selfwill is content to lose itself in the love of One Whose mercies fail not. But here the lesson was of punishment alone. Humbled, terrified, but unrepentant, Belshazzar listens to his doom. And as Daniel spake the words of interpretation, already the storm was gathering close around that was to sweep him away. And again and again, it may be, the words of Daniel resounded in his ears: "The God in Whose hand thy breath is, and Whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified."

Belshazzar

BY REV. ISAAC KEELING.

"Thou, his son, O Belshazzar," etc.—Daniel v. 22, 23.

When this inglorious and unhappy prince came to the throne, the state was already full of disorder and corruption; the manners of the people were become effeminate; both their minds and bodies were enfeebled by luxury and indulgence, and the strength and authority of the empire had begun rapidly to decline.

At the time when Daniel was brought before Belshazzar, his vast metropolis was in a state of siege. One of his predecessors had wantonly provoked a dangerous war with the Medes; a powerful people who had assisted the kings of Babylon in the conquest of Nineveh, and whose formidable alliance had been one of the bulwarks of the Chaldean empire. The events of this imprudent and sanguinary contest, had been generally favourable to the Medes, whose cause was supported by their neighbours the Persians. By repeated overthrows, the Babylonians were so weakened and dispirited, that they durst no longer encounter their enemies in the field; but shut themselves up within the fortified walls of their vast capital. These walls are said to have been twenty-five yards broad, and one hundred yards high, and to have formed a regular square, each side of which was fifteen miles long; with twenty-five gates on each side, opening into as many streets. During the siege, this extensive fortification was the whole of Belshazzar's real kingdom, and contained all his actual and available resources. But the city being filled with wealth of every kind, stored with provisions for twenty years, encompassed outside the walls with a wide and deep moat, filled with water from the river, and defended by a very numerous garrison; the infatuated government imagined itself secure, and derided the patient and determined efforts of the invaders. The imperious king and his dissipated court gave their time and attention to the soft

luxuries and vain amusements of peace; instead of the austere toil and vigilance of war. While the enemy was thundering at their gates, or deeply revolving new plans for their destruction; they vied with each other in the splendour of dress and the pomp of entertainments; they ate, drank, sang, danced, and made merry; and not content with defying the besieging armies, they drank derision and defiance to the King of Heaven. This was the climax of their daring course of permitted impiety; the measure of their iniquities was now full; and this last drop made the waters of bitterness overflow.

This last great provocation, which drew down the lingering vengeance that had long hung over Babylon, we shall state in the words of this record. "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords," etc.

While these things were transacting, while the infatuated king was insulting Jehovah, and wounding the best feelings of His humbled and suffering people, God interposed in His own cause, and stopped the royal drunkard in his career of insolent impiety.

In the midst of his revelling, a mysterious apparition met the eyes of the astonished prince; and festive glow and the noise of mirth were instantly turned into a scene of pale fright and screaming horror. "There came forth fingers of a man's hand," a hand without an arm or a body, nay part of a hand, "and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his bones were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." Well might his countenance be changed! His alarmed conscience foreboded evils of undefinable magnitude. In the height of his panic he called for the juggling magicians, the crafty soothsayers and pretended wise men, and urged them with the promise of vast rewards, to read and interpret the mysterious characters. The magnificent offers held out to them, incited them to attempt their utmost; but the terrible prodigy confounded their arts, and compelled them to acknowledge their ignorance.

From the manner in which Daniel was afterwards introduced, it appears as if, in the reigns intervening between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, he had fallen into neglect and obscurity, so as to be almost unknown to the king and his courtiers. Nebuchadnezzar had raised him to important employments and distinguished honours; but the successors of that great king seem to have inherited his pride and extravagance, without imitating his candour, his openness to conviction, and his sincere humiliation. Nebuchadnezzar had been accustomed to make Daniel his most trusted counsellor when his thoughts troubled him, and when his mind was agitated by supernatural intimations; but the successors of deceased sovereigns frequently neglect the friends and favourites of departed power; hence, when Daniel's patron died, a new set of men would probably divide among them the favours of royalty, and he would be laid aside with the old administration.

But the fame of his former greatness and unequalled wisdom was still remembered by some, and particularly by the queen, probably the widow of one of the former monarchs, and supposed by some to be the mother of Belshazzar, and the aunt of Cyrus. The tumult in the banqueting house reached her ear in another part of the palace. She came to the hall of feasting and saw the whole assembly astonished, and the king half dead with fear. She reminded him of Daniel, and advised that he should be consulted concerning the tremendous mystery.

Daniel, long estranged from courts, was then brought before the royal presence in this hour of need; and the pale prince addressed him as follows: "Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king, my father, brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof; but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: and I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and thou shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom."

The heavenly minded Daniel heard these imperial offers not like a man of this world. None of the spectators detected the alacrity of worldly ambition sparkle in his eye when he was told of the scarlet robe, the chain of gold, and the third office in the kingdom. He introduces his reply like an incorruptible man. He had not been elated by the favour of princes, nor disheartened by their neglect. Therefore he shews no

selfish eagerness, he uses no flattery, he betrays no frailty on this critical occasion, amidst the sincere compliments of the terrified king, and his lavish promises of power and honour. He calmly declines his proffered gifts and rewards; yet undertakes to read the writing and make known to him the interpretation.

But before he satisfied the king's anxious and torturing curiosity, he judged it right to put him in remembrance of some solemn circumstances which Belshazzar well knew, but which the pursuits of pride and folly had prevented him from recollecting or regarding: and by displaying the connexion of those circumstances with the portentous miracle before him, he prepared the way for an irresistible inroad into Belshazzar's guilty conscience.

He reminds him first of the power and grandeur of Nebuchadnezzar, and of the real cause of his greatness and prosperity,—the will of God. "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father" (thy ancestor) "a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour, and for the majesty that He gave him, all people, nations and languages trembled before him; whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down." He reminds him of Nebuchadnezzar's offence, his heart being lifted up and his mind hardened in pride, forgetting that God ruleth, and that conquest and royalty are dependent on His will.

He repeats to Belshazzar what he already knew of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment, and the reformation it wrought in his haughty mind. "He was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him; and he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that He appointeth over it whomsoever He will."

He then, in the words of the text, tells him that all these striking providences were and must be well known to him; and that he ought to have taken warning and been humbled, by examples so instructive and judgments so impressive.

He boldly accuses him, to his face, of having sinned against knowledge and conviction; of remaining hardened, unhumbled, and irreligious, notwithstanding he had all the proof he could desire or demand of the power, holiness, and severity of Israel's God.

He not only charges him with guilty neglect in being unhumbled, but reproaches his pride and insolence in positive terms:—first, generally, in the text, "Thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven":—then, more particularly by singling out the aggravated instance of his recent profaneness: "They have brought the vessels of His house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in Whose hand thy breath is, and Whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

He speaks pointedly and searchingly to the awakened conscience and trembling heart of the royal criminal; who was too sincerely terrified to interrupt or contradict him, when he said, "thou knewest all this."

By this introductory statement, Daniel intended to shew Belshazzar that his sin was aggravated and inexcusable; that he previously knew the power and terrors of the living God he had insulted; that he could not plead ignorance, being actually in possession of the most impressive information, sufficient to have cautioned him against such pride and profaneness as he had wantonly and ostentatiously displayed.

By reminding Belshazzar of what he was doing when he first saw the apparition, he shews his crime and the mystery before his eyes to be inseparably linked together; and recalls, with additional force, those insupportable feelings with which conscience overwhelmed Belshazzar, at the first sight of the hand and its writing.

All the time that the Prophet was delivering this impressive exordium, the mysterious words were manifested on the wall; and the panic-stricken king had to endure at once the sight of this ominous message from the invisible world, and the calm unanswerable reproaches of the man of God.

Daniel, having finished his circumstantial and appalling charge, then, without disguise, evasion, or delay, proceeds to read the miraculous writing, to explain the mysterious meaning of the portentous characters, and announce to the crowned sinner the consequences of his last provocation. At this juncture, we are told, the apparition

of the fingers vanished, "and this writing was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel; thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting. Peres; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

The last act of Belshazzar, which is here recorded, has a favourable aspect; and may be viewed as the outward and visible sign of an inward, spiritual humiliation, and, at the same time, magnanimity. Though Daniel had been to him a prophet of evil, though he had heard from him nothing but reproof and denunciation, he immediately conferred upon him the rewards he had promised to whomsoever should read the writing and shew the interpretation of it. "He commanded, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Not like Ahab, whose last mentioned act before going up to the fatal battle at Ramoth Gilead, contrary to the direct prohibition of God by the mouth of Micaiah, was to denounce Micaiah "to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son," saying, "Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace." The magnanimity of Belshazzar's conduct to Daniel, which the Holy Spirit has thus kept in remembrance, while the only further statement concerning him is "in that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain," gives some hope respecting him that though he was punished with a speedy and violent death, he may have delayed not to humble his heart in true penitence and sorrow for sin, and may, through God's infinite mercy, have saved his soul alive.

1. The power of *conscience*.

Why should Belshazzar, on a festive occasion, be overwhelmed with terror at the sight of a miracle, which flattery might have interpreted into an omen of new glories? The consciousness of general and recent guilt smote him—conscience told him that the invisible powers he insulted could not manifestly appear and interpose for his advantage.

Why should a proud tyrant hear a captive, whose life was at his disposal, accusing him so boldly and severely, without interruption or resentment? Conscience laid her paralysing hand upon him. Conscience, armed for a season with irresistible powers, held absolute dominion over the despot, and said, be still.

2. The *vanity* of the world, the feebleness, the less than nothingness of pomp, flattery, voluptuousness, dissipation, and profane amusement. How easily can God blast them all in a moment, and change the wild delirium of joy and grandeur to the intolerable agony of helpless, comfortless, desolate, unspeakable despair!

3. The *use and responsibility* of knowledge; and especially of the conviction resulting from the sight of God's judgments on others. When He inflicts signal vengeance on an individual or a nation, He expects and requires that spectators and survivors should humble their hearts before Him and repent.

4. The *peril* of pride and profaneness instanced in this particular example. Is there not reason to suspect that men are just on the brink of perdition when they defy earth and Heaven!

5. The *terrors* of the invisible world, and the inexhaustible instruments of Divine wrath. If so small a manifestation was attended with such irresistible and intolerable horror, what will be the effect when all the appalling sights and sounds of the realm of darkness, burst on the astonished view of a departing soul!

6. The *helplessness* of guilt, when God riseth up. "In the same night was Belshazzar the king slain," and his kingdom destroyed. Jeremiah li. 39-57.

7. The *superiority* of religious uprightness. What a shield, what a rock is piety! How solid the grandeur of a man of God! When the multitude are made to feel the powers of the world to come, the contempt and dishonour which appeared to them to cover the pious as a dirty veil, vanish in an instant. When the terrors of God are upon men, His servants appear to them invested with awful dignity, as almost more than mortal.

Contrast the trembling, crest-fallen, frightened king with the calm magnanimity, the awful goodness, and Divine authority of the Prophet of the Lord.

Let us now remind you of what you know.

You know that there is a God. You know His holiness and severity. You have heard of His judgments, His threatenings have been sounded in your ears, His Gospel has been offered to you.

Have you *known all this* without effect? are you *still un-humbled*?

Are any of you profane? Dare you sleep to-night for the terror of your offended God? Does not your imagination portray a visionary hand writing your sentence? Does not your conscience see the balances of judgment held in Heaven, and yourselves found wanting? Are there no Belshazzars now, whose thoughts trouble them, because they *have known much but have not humbled themselves*, and who tremble under the weight of their guilty terrors? If any of you have at present Belshazzar's feelings, ought you not to apprehend a punishment as certain and as dreadful, without a speedy and sincere repentance?

Consider the superiority of your religious privileges over those of Belshazzar, and your proportionate responsibility, who live in a Christian country, under the light and advantages of the dispensation of grace, and with the warnings and precepts of God's Word. If he was judged for not having profited by the example of Nebuchadnezzar, how will *you* answer for your unused and abused privileges? "Thou hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven." O let me warn and beseech you to presume no further on the forbearing mercy of God! Delay not to humble your hearts before Him, lest punishment swiftly overtake you in your sins. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

Amos

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"The words of Amos," etc.—Amos i. 1.

The Prophet Amos lived in the time of Uzziah, king of Judah, and of Jeroboam, king of Israel, not the first king of that name, "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," but the second, the grandson of Jehu. This was almost 800 years before Christ. He was of Tekoa, a place within the kingdom of Judah; but his prophecy was more against Israel than Judah, and it was in Israel that it was delivered.

Amos was a herdman, a keeper of cattle or sheep, perhaps both. Whether he was an owner or only a servant does not appear; but certainly he tended cattle in person. This, however, was no degradation then, but rather an honourable employment. Still, it was a humble line of life; and as such our attention is drawn to it. At the opening of the prophecy Amos is mentioned as being "among the herdmen of Tekoa," and afterwards he says of himself, "I was no Prophet, neither was I a Prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock." Such was his station. He was not great, or rich, or learned. He neither had great flocks and herds, in the care of which he employed many servants, nor had he been born the son of a Prophet and brought up in one of the schools of the Prophets. He was a husbandman and keeper of cattle. His business was to tend flocks and herds, and at the fit season to gather the fruit of the sycamore, or wild fig-tree, used in those countries as an article of food. While engaged thus, the Lord took him, sent him to prophesy to the people of Israel, and inspired him accordingly.

God chooses for His instruments whom He pleases. It might have been thought that He would have chosen as His messenger some devout and studious young man from one of the schools of the Prophets; instead of this, He set His eyes on the herdmen of Tekoa, and one of them, even as he was following the flock, He choose to speak His word. Even so now God does not choose His servants all from one rank, and often He chooses those who would have seemed unlikely. Often those of humble birth are raised to posts of great usefulness, and men of little learning or early training are used by God for high purposes. God seeth not as man seeth.

But though Amos was only a herdman, his prophecy is grand, solemn, and striking. There are some passages in it, almost equal in beauty and sublimity to any in Isaiah. The messages with which he was charged he delivered in no poor or mean words, but in high and glowing language, suited to the greatness of his subject. This, too, was of God; for God not only chooses His instruments, but also fits them for His work. He taught the simple herdman to speak thus. He inspired the fig-gatherer with high thoughts and burning words. Thus does God deal still with those whom He chooses for His

service. He fits them for the work to which He appoints them. It is not indeed every work that requires great powers of mind or speech; for some kinds of work humbler powers are sufficient. But where the work needs more, it is no difficulty with God to give more. We often see that when men are called to some new and important work, not only is inward grace given for it, but even the natural powers are quickened and strengthened, the mind is elevated and enlarged, the tongue is unloosened, the judgment is improved; and as the work becomes higher and more important, so does the power increase too. Use indeed does much; yet even this is of God's appointment: but, besides this, God does directly and particularly fit and empower His servants for the work to which He calls them.

Yet, for all this, each servant of God still keeps his own natural character, remembers, and perhaps even retains old habits of life (if not evil), and turns those very recollections and associations to good account in the service of God. It is striking to observe in the prophecy of Amos, amid high and grand language, allusions and images that remind us still of the herdman and the gatherer of figs. For instance, the opening words of the prophecy are these, "The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and *the habitations of the shepherds* shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither." Again the Prophet had in mind the forest-trees among which he was accustomed to lead his flocks and herds, when he said, speaking in the name of the Lord and by His inspiration, "Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks." We trace his remembrance of past dangers in cattle-keeping when he says, "Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing?" And again, "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear." When he upbraids the oppressors of the poor, he does it in these words, "Hear this word, ye *king of Bashan*, that are in the mountain of Samaria." When he exhorts the house of Israel to seek the Lord, he does it as one who had passed many a night in the open air guarding the flock, and had thus often watched the stars, and seen many a day break: "Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night." And in the vision of "a basket of summer fruit," shown him by the Lord, we see that it pleased God to reveal His will to him in a way suited to one who was not only a herdman, but also a gatherer of sycamore fruit.

We may learn a lesson from this. All past habits of life, all old associations, and all special knowledge which a man may have gained in his calling before he began to work for God, may become useful in His service, especially among those whose habits and associations are still such. While *all* the people of Israel were bound to reverence the words of Amos, as spoken in the name of the Lord, what he said came doubtless with peculiar force to those who, like him, were herdmen and fruit-gatherers, or at least acquainted with that way of life, and who could therefore enter more than others into the figures which he used. In like manner now a godly shepherd or labourer can speak to those of the same calling with more point and force than others, because he knows their thoughts and habits; for the same reason a sailor can address sailors, a soldier soldiers, as no one else can. Thus *all* may be used for God; and all ways of life, and all special knowledge and experience, may become *talents* to be employed in His service. Many a minister of the Word, who has turned to that holy office from some other profession, has found himself greatly helped in his ministry by what he learnt and did in his old way of life.

The herdman of Tekoa did not push himself into the office of a Prophet. He would doubtless have been well content, still to tend the flock and gather the fruit; and thus doubtless he expected to pass his days. It was not till God called him, that he changed his course of life, and began to speak in His name. Then, however, he did not hang back. Thus he justified himself to Amaziah, "I was no Prophet, neither was I a Prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto My people Israel."

In like manner, every servant of God should hold himself in readiness to obey His call; neither thrusting himself forward into a work to which he is not sent, nor holding back from that in which God would have him engage. An eager spirit may be tempted to over-forwardness, and even personal ambition and the love of influence may weigh with some; while, on the other hand, humility, diffidence, a retiring disposition, or less

worthy causes, such as indolence or lukewarmness, may make others too backward. How is the will of God to be known? No direct command is now to be expected, such as came to Amos; how then are we to distinguish between the voice of God and our own inclination? We have the written Word, we have the promised help of the Holy Spirit, and we have also our own powers of judgment. All these we are to use together, in the spirit of those words of Scripture, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Here is a rule for both the eager and the diffident. Though no voice from Heaven will be heard, yet the humble inquirer, who simply desires to know the will of God that he may do it, will not be left without guidance. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" "Here am I; send me." Let such be the feeling and the prayer of every servant of God. Let each, through grace, lay aside every selfish feeling, whether of forwardness or backwardness, and humbly put himself at God's disposal, to go or to stay.

Amos, called from a humble station to do a great public work, not thrusting himself forward but sent by God, was firm and steadfast, and delivered his message faithfully, undeterred by the fear of man. How striking the contrast between his conduct and that of Amaziah! Amaziah was the priest of Bethel, a false priest, a successor of those made by the first Jeroboam. This man could not bear the faithful words of Amos, so he informed the king against him. "Amos," said he, "hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land." The latter part of the accusation was true in substance, for Amos had indeed foretold such judgments; though the words were not his, but the Lord's. The former part was *not* true; Amos had not conspired against the king; he had but spoken God's sentence against him and his people. But the false priest would stick at nothing to get the true Prophet out of the way. Yet he did not seek to have him killed. So, when he had sent word against him to the king, he advised Amos to flee; "O thou seer, go, flee thee away unto the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there." And then he added, "But prophesy not again any more at Bethel; for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." The courtly priest, false and worldly-minded, would have no unwelcome truth spoken in royal places. Doubtless he did in his heart believe the words of Amos to be truth, the truth of God, for he called Amos a *seer*; but, truth or not truth, he would not have the king's court, nay, his very chapel or sanctuary, disturbed by such words; if possible, he would banish them from the whole kingdom.

But Amos would not flee. He had not come of himself with such a message; God had sent him: so he declared to Amaziah. And this message of God he would faithfully deliver, however unwelcome it might be. But now he had a further message, even against the false priest himself; and this also he delivered without fear; "Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land."

Thus this faithful messenger would make no difference between one place and another in delivering his message, he would speak it forth in the chapel and court of the king as well as in humbler places; nay, yet more there than elsewhere, because it was thither that he was especially sent. He would not go back to his own country, the land of Judah, where at that time true religion flourished more than in Israel, and there, at a safe distance, speak forth the threatenings of the Lord against Israel. To Israel he was sent, and in the land of Israel he would speak; for the king especially he had a message, and in the very court of the king the message should be delivered.

Those who speak in God's name may well learn a lesson of faithfulness from Amos. The message of God is *one*, and is sent to all classes alike. Let no forms or usages of society be suffered to stand in the way of the ministry of God's Word. Let the servant of Christ seek to deliver his message to rich and poor alike. And wherever he can find admittance, there let him show himself a faithful messenger. Though expressed perhaps in somewhat different language (and yet a simple Gospel should always and everywhere be set forth simply), let the same Word of Truth be heard in court and in cottage, by the most polished congregation of a great city, and by the humblest gathering in a

village church. Amos, the herdman, delivered God's message in the king's court: let the messengers of God be equally faithful now. Let there be no respect of persons. Everywhere, humbly, lovingly, faithfully, and boldly, let the Word of God be spoken, whether in comfort and promise, or in warning and reproof.

Amos

BY REV. G. H. FOWLER, M.A.

"Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."—Amos v. 24.

I think it is, perhaps, a pity that, when, our Lectionary was revised, Amos was not given his proper position in the Sunday Lessons; it is a pity that he should be made to follow, instead of precede Hosea, as historically he most certainly did. I need make no apology, therefore, for taking Amos first.

Let us look at the man first—the man whose first appearance as a Prophet is one of the most striking and picturesque scenes in Hebrew history. Who is he, this strange figure, that we can so easily picture to ourselves, standing forth, fearlessly exposing the corruptions of society and the hypocrisy of the national religion, in the very sanctuary of that religion itself; fearlessly proclaiming the Divine judgment which is hanging over the heads of king and people? "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be led away captive out of their own land."

1. Who is he? He tells us himself who he is. "I am no Prophet; I am not one of the sons of the Prophets." He does not belong to one of those guilds or associations which went by the name of the "sons of the Prophets," the members of which seem to have lost their first faith, their early zeal and inspiration; had become merely professional men who made prophesying a trade, and had become the scorn of earnest true-hearted men. Amos has no connection with these degenerate prophets, he indignantly repudiates the imputation; he is not even an Israelite, a member of the northern kingdom; he is a native of Judah; his home was in the little town of Tekoa, a few miles south of Bethlehem; his occupation the very humble one of a shepherd on the neighbouring hills, and a cultivator of sycamore figs—the coarser and least desirable of the fruits of Canaan. His position, that is to say, was hardly above that of a common labourer; but, strange to say, he was no unlettered clown, as the old commentators supposed. He was familiar with the history of his own nation and the neighbouring states; he had an intimate knowledge of what was going on in Damascus and Tyre, in Moab and Edom; he knew about the movements of the people; he knew that the Philistines came from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir, as well as that Israel had been redeemed from Egypt; he thoroughly understood the politics of his age, and he was keenly alive to the social and religious condition not only of his own country, but of the northern kingdom too. And yet, is it so very surprising when we come to think of it? Lowly pursuits do not necessarily involve ignorance or indifference to higher things. Amos was free probably from some of the degrading and debasing influences which weigh down our own working classes. He was doubtless accustomed to repair to the capital for the religious festivals; there he would use his tongue, his ears, his eyes. He had little or no access perhaps to books; but are not books and newspapers sometimes a hindrance rather than a help to real thought? Do we not often get our thinking done for us in and by them? In the East, as a modern writer has observed, "shrewd observation, a memory retentive of traditional law, and the faculty of original reflection took the place of laborious study." It is not, therefore, so strange as we might at first sight suppose, that this shepherd of Tekoa, who, peasant though he was, must have been a man of an original mind, unsophisticated, true-hearted, clear-sighted, should have retained in his memory all that he had heard, that he should have thought out for himself some of the great questions of the day, as he kept his long watches on the lonely hills of Judah, for there is no necessity to suppose, as some have supposed, that this historical and political knowledge was given him by Divine revelation. It seems to me that such an explanation of it is just one of the things which help to make these Old Testament characters shadowy and unreal. We lose touch with them; we lose interest in them; they cease to be human; they cease to be men of like passions with ourselves, and there is no

cause. We have proof enough, if we will only search the Scriptures, of the Divine inspiration of the Prophets, without trying to extend that inspiration to knowledge which could quite well be acquired without it.

Amos was a clear-sighted, sagacious, and thoughtful man; but he was much more than this. He was a man, like our own Bishop Butler, with an awful sense of religion, a man who lived in close and constant communion with God; and a man, therefore, who studied these topics of the day, these political, social, and religious questions, in the light of God, and submitted them all to the test of the Divine righteousness.

Amos was a Prophet; because, as one has well said, "a Prophet was a man who knew the character of the true and living God; and because he knew and loved Him, and was living with Him, he made other men know Him, and understand Him too." Amos knew the character of the true and living God, and was living with Him. And as he follows his flock in the wilderness of Judæa, brooding over these problems, filled with a Divine impatience, a Divine indignation against the thoughtlessness, and frivolity, and irreligion of his time, longing to deliver his soul; while he is thus musing the fire kindled, a Divine word comes to him, "Go prophesy unto My people Israel." "Not merely go and utter predictions, go and foretell events which are to happen; not this only or primarily, but go and forthtell what you have heard and learnt from Me; go and deliver My message to the conscience of Israel. Go and reveal to them those eternal principles of righteousness which I have revealed to you. Go and show them how their religion, their politics, their social relations, look in the light of these principles. Go and proclaim the sure and inevitable consequences of the neglect and violation of these Divine laws. Go and announce the near approach of judgment."

So it must have come to Amos, this message from the Eternal. He is sure that God has spoken to him, he cannot escape the responsibility; a necessity is laid upon him, the Divine impulse is irresistible. So they all felt, these Prophets of Israel, "The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"

And so we find him, armed with no other credentials than that the word of Jehovah burned within him, standing forth in the midst of the brilliant crowd that thronged the royal sanctuary at Bethel, to proclaim what Jehovah had spoken against the children of Israel; then, when everything was lawless life and boisterous joy, to announce a near and inevitable destruction as a Divine necessity. Why lawless life and boisterous joy?

2. To understand why, we must try to realize a little the condition of the kingdom, and the state of society. The time was the first half of the reign of Jeroboam II., practically the last king of the house of Jehu, for his son reigned but six months, and after him the deluge—as you will see, if you read the history in the Kings. The historian tells us but little about Jeroboam II., but that little is very significant. "He restored," we are told, "the coast of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the plain." That is to say, that in the reign of this sovereign the territories of Israel were extended even beyond the limits which they had reached in the palmiest days of Solomon; this fact, and the allusions which run all through the Book of Amos, prove conclusively that the northern kingdom at this epoch was at the very zenith of power, wealth, security, and luxury. And yet we know that, in the reign of this king's grandfather, Jehoahaz, the nation had been reduced to such terrible straits that the once mighty kingdom of Israel could put but fifty horsemen and ten chariots into the field; for, the narrative goes on, "The King of Syria had destroyed them, and made them like the dust." The reason of this surprising change in the fortunes of Israel is obvious enough, it is implied in that last sentence. Syria of Damascus—the Syrian confederacy whose centre was Damascus—the northern neighbour of Israel, had always been a thorn in her side, had always been her most dangerous rival. Again and again we read of war between Syria and Israel, and constantly we hear of Israel's getting the worst of it; but now the old enemy of Israel has ceased to be formidable, Damascus is itself engaged in a life and death struggle with the great world-power whose capital was at Nineveh, the great world-power of Assyria, which is slowly, but surely, drawing nearer and nearer to the Holy Land, of which Damascus is the key. But at this crisis Damascus is acting as a breakwater to Israel, and keeping out the great flood of Assyrian invasion, which is destined later on—and Amos saw it, though he does not name Assyria—to submerge the land of Jehovah. Meanwhile Israel is respited; she has breathing time. She is free from hostile attack, and she has made the most of it. She has largely extended her territories; she has developed her resources. She is prosperous, rich, and powerful; the times are times of peace. Trade is good; money is plentiful; the country is sunning

itself, so a superficial observer would think, and so the people themselves believed, under the special favour of Jehovah. But Amos sees below the surface, and he tells us in very plain language what he sees—the usual consequences of very good times. The upper classes, who have grown suddenly rich, have given themselves up to unbridled sensuality and self-indulgence; “They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches; they eat the lambs out of the flock, and calves out of the midst of the stall.” Drunkenness is rampant, even among the women, “They drink wine in bowls,” “the kine of Bashan,” as the Prophet calls them, who say to their lords, “Bring, and let us drink.” Amongst the trading classes there is that race for wealth, that impatience to get rich, which we are not unfamiliar with in other times, and in other lands; that feverish thirst for gold, which frets at every restraint upon it, and says, “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small and the shekel great.” How clearly we see it all—the short weight, the hard bargains, the sharp practice of the merchants and tradesmen.

But, if this is a true picture of the upper and middle classes, we hardly need to be told that the poor had a bad time of it. Luxury, extravagance, money-grubbing, are always followed by oppression of the poor, by hard-hearted rapacity, by miscarriage of justice. And so it was in Samaria. “They tread upon the poor, and take from him presents; they afflict the just; they take bribes; they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right; they sell them the refuse of the wheat”; they gamble and drink with the spoils of the poor, even at the very sanctuary of God. They anticipate the modern sweeter, when “They buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes.” And then, to make the picture complete, we hear of something which sounds not unlike strikes, commotions, and disturbances already beginning to take place in the capital. When Amos cries, “Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and behold the great tumults in the midst thereof, and oppressions in the midst thereof.” Such is a sketch of the picture which Amos gives us of the social conditions of Samaria. And what of its religious state? Well, we know that, from the very beginning, the religion of Jehovah had assumed a debased and degraded form in the northern kingdom, when the first Jeroboam established the calves at Bethel and Dan; and there can be little doubt that this worship became still more corrupted as time went on, by idolatrous and heathenish elements. Yet it was nominally the worship of Jehovah, and the men of Samaria prided themselves on being the people of Jehovah, on enjoying His favour; and never had His worship been more zealously and assiduously carried on. Sacrifices, tithes, oblations, streamed into the sanctuaries; there were hosts of people who were most diligent in attending the feasts, and observing the fasts, and bringing their offerings, in preserving all the old traditions, who were actually looking forward to that Day of the Lord, which to the Prophets was always a day of judgment, thinking that they at least would reap the reward of their zealous serving, though others might be destroyed. “Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord, to what end is it for you?” cries Amos. “The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light, even very dark, and no brightness in it?” Yes, it is this blind, loveless self-righteousness, this Pharisaism, this mere ritualism, this worship from which the true spirit of religion had fled, that calls for the most scathing condemnation from the peasant Prophet. “Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply your transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days. For this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God.” “I hate, I despise your feast days. I will smell no sweet savour in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer Me burnt offerings, I will not accept them.” Your worship is all a mockery and a sham; there is no penitence and no righteousness. You have silenced the Prophets; you have commanded the Prophets, saying, “Prophecy not.” You have divorced religion from morality. Therefore, “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.”

3. Into the very heart of this luxurious and corrupt society, into the royal sanctuary of Bethel itself, as we have seen, comes Amos of Tekoa, in his rough shepherd dress, with his rough peasant speech, and delivers Jehovah's message to Jehovah's apostate children, a message of judgment, sure and near. How much of his prophecy he actually spoke, how far the symbolism which he used was intelligible to the audience, we cannot say, but at least the last words were plain enough, “The sanctuary of Israel shall be laid waste and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” They were so plain and so menacing that the priest Amaziah takes alarm, and sends word to the

king, accusing Amos of treason and conspiracy against the government. "Amos hath conspired against thee, the land is not able to bear all his words." And then he turns to the Prophet, this sleek and worldly priest, who had long lost all earnestness and sincerity himself, and pretended at last to disbelieve the existence of it in any one else. He affects to treat Amos as if he were one of those professional prophets who made a trade of prophesying, half fanatic, half intriguer, who was making a bold bid for notoriety, in the hope that the court might buy him off. "O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy not again any more at Bethel, for it is a royal sanctuary and a national temple." Then follows the Prophet's indignant disclaimer of the priestly insinuation, a solemn repetition of his prediction of judgment, which would fall with special weight upon the family of the priest himself, "and Israel shall surely go into captivity out of his land." What took place after this we are not told, Amos doubtless had to yield to superior force. Most likely he made his escape back to his own country, where he placed on record the words of Jehovah, which the house of Israel refused to hear or to heed.

4. Now, may I call your attention very briefly to a few of the leading ideas of Amos, ideas most of which are far and away above the ordinary level of the thought of his age, and must have come from God. And, first, he has a firm grasp on that truth which Israel as a people always failed to reach up to, the truth that Jehovah is not the God of Israel only, but the God of all the other nations, He is the supreme ruler of the universe. "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me, O children of Israel?" What a thing to say to proud exclusive Israel. Amos sees Jehovah behind the movements of the nations. "Did I not bring up the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir (in Mesopotamia), as well as Israel out of Egypt?" Yes, and upon the conscience of all these nations, as well as upon that of Israel, Jehovah has impressed certain simple laws of morality. If these are violated, whether by the nations or by Israel, punishment will be inflicted by Jehovah on all alike. The heathen nations are to be judged not because they do not worship Israel's God, but because they have broken the laws of universal morality. This is why Amos begins his prophecy with the judgment which is to fall upon the nations. This is the meaning of that constantly repeated burden, "For three transgressions and for four," of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, and others. They are punished, you will observe, for cruelty and barbarity; for violating the universal laws of humanity; but then he works up, with a most dramatic and unexpected climax, to Judah and Israel. Yes, they have sinned like the heathen; they will be punished like the heathen. God makes no excuses, He is no respecter of persons. But, have we then no privileges—are we not specially Jehovah's people? Such might be the natural plea of the Israelite. Yes, says Amos, "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness." "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," you do stand in a peculiar relation to Me. But, what then? You are My people in a sense in which no other is, "therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." Just because you are Jehovah's people, because you have received such special marks of His favour and His love, will He punish you, for this only makes your responsibility greater and the judgment upon you more certain and severe. Yes, you, and others through you, must learn that eternal lesson, that greater privilege brings greater responsibility. And again, if you point to the crowded temple, to the smoking altars, if you plead that you do serve Jehovah so zealously, so assiduously, that your tithes and your offerings are so punctual and so regular, know that all this splendid ceremonial is useless, nay, loathsome to Jehovah, while it is linked with immorality, injustice, inhumanity. What then does Jehovah want? you ask. "Seek the Lord and ye shall live." Seek Me. Yes, that is what He wants. Know Him, understand His character, His Will, and you will see that what Jehovah wants is sincerity rather than sacrifice, righteousness before ritual. "Let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a never dying stream."

This is the key to the book, this is the core of the prophecy. Amos does not denounce the worship of Israel because it is a degraded form of religion, not because it is calf worship (like his successor Hosea), not because it is schismatical, not this mainly or primarily, but because it is offered by unrighteous and immoral worshippers, because it gives positive encouragement to the injustice, the sensuality, the barbarous treatment of the poor, which are the crying sins of Israel. The keynote of Amos is righteousness, the keyword of Hosea is love.

5. Lastly, Amos feels that the corruption of society has gone so deep, that there is no

hope of reform, no hope of averting the judgment; his inspired gaze can see what Israel is too blinded to see—the shadow of the coming doom lengthening out. He can see the armies of Assyria drawing nearer to the devoted land, he knows that the old religious enthusiasm of Israel is gone beyond recall, the old hardihood of simpler days has been sapped by luxury and sensuality. What is there left which can stand against the onset of the legions of the Great King? Israel is doomed. “Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth.”

Yes, Israel is doomed. But then, just when you least expect it, the Prophet's tone changes; out of the depths of despair he rises to the most confident hope. The judgment is not final, it is remedial. Like Isaiah, like all the Prophets, “Zion shall be redeemed by judgment,” only the chaff, the worthless mass, will be destroyed, the good grain, the righteous, will be saved. It is indestructible. Jehovah scatters Israel, and He will do so, but He can also bring them back with the same ease. The dark night of judgment is succeeded by the bright dawn of a new day, when Israel, once again a united people, is restored to its land, purified by judgment, and ruled by its old royal house.

Such are some of the leading ideas, very inadequately represented, of the Prophet, such is the gist of his message; and though there may be little of distinct prediction in his book, little that directly foreshadows the Christ, does it not bear upon it the evident mark of Divine inspiration, and is it not a message to us, as well as to Israel? And though other Prophets have more to teach us than he about the spiritual life; though Christianity may make religion more beautiful and attractive and inspiring, and may supply us with a motive power which Amos cannot, yet he goes to the root of the matter when he makes religion rest upon righteousness. Yes, there may be zeal for religion, there may be delight in it, there may be warm feelings and easily stirred emotions. These may exist, and do exist, with a lax morality and a feeble sense of our duty to our neighbour and our God. Amos teaches, and teaches truly, that there can be no stable religious character which is not built upon the foundation of the moral law.

Hosea

BY REV. G. H. FOWLER, M.A.

“Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord.”—Hosea vi. 3.

Jeroboam II., in whose reign Amos delivered his message to Israel, must have been an exceptionally strong man or an exceptionally fortunate man; at any rate, Israel remained powerful and prosperous while he lived, though Amos tells us how, during these palmy times, moral and social corruption was preying on the very vitals of the people. We are not unprepared therefore to hear of the collapse which soon followed the death of Jeroboam. His son Zechariah succeeded him; but in six months he fell a victim to the assassin, and with him fell the house of Jehu, which had reigned in Samaria for more than a hundred years. Israel's short respite was over, the short spell of prosperity came to an end, and the period which follows and covers the last years of the northern kingdom, is as darkened by disasters as the preceding had been brightened by success.

The narrative in the history of the Book of Kings is little more than a record of treachery, conspiracy, assassination, and usurpation. Some bold adventurer forms a plot, murders the reigning sovereign, seizes the throne, and, after a few years more or less of a reign of terror, he becomes, in his turn, the victim of sedition, and perishes by the hand of the conspirator. Out of six kings who rapidly follow one another, only one dies in his bed and is succeeded by his son. And this man, Menahem, who obtained the crown after a ferocious struggle, finding himself even then somewhat insecure, adopts the fatal policy—the policy of our own British forefathers—of calling to his aid the great king, the king of Assyria, to assist him in making his position good. The great king never lost an opportunity, never rendered a service for nothing. Israel becomes tributary to Assyria, and the foe, whose approach Amos foresaw, has laid his strong hand on Israel, never again to relax his grasp.

Pekah, the son of Remaliah, the last but one of these adventurer sovereigns, was an abler and a stronger man than the rest. He conceived and endeavoured to carry out a really great idea—an idea worthy of a Bismarck or a Napoleon. He formed an alliance,

offensive and defensive, with the king of Syria, which is known as the Syro-Israelitish League. The two allied powers were to attack the kingdom of Judah, dethrone the reigning sovereign, Ahaz, unite the southern to the northern kingdom under one head, who was to be Pekah himself, in the hope that the united kingdom, in close conjunction with Damascus, might form a compact and powerful state which would prove a bulwark to Palestine, such as the waves of Assyrian invasion would dash against in vain. It was a great scheme. Isaiah tells us about it in his seventh chapter. It failed, because Ahaz called in the great king to his assistance, and the only result was that Israel was crippled by the loss of a large slice of her northern territory. The last king of Israel bears the same name as her last Prophet. He has a better character from the historian than his predecessors, though he, too, has to reckon with Assyria, and to pay his tribute; but he is eager to cast off the yoke; he is induced to intrigue with Egypt, a false and fatal policy. Egypt then, as always, proves a broken reed; no help is given, and Assyrian vengeance soon overtakes the hapless king. He is summoned to answer for his conduct; he is cast into prison, and disappears from sight in the pathetic words of the Prophet, "As for Samaria, her king is cut off like the foam upon the waters." The armies of Assyria overrun the country. Samaria is besieged, and, after a brave and stubborn resistance of three years, it falls, and the kingdom of Israel ceases to be.

It is this last period of Israelite history which is illustrated by Hosea's book, or rather, I should say, by the last eleven chapters. The first three relate to the reign of Jeroboam II., the gala days of the nation, when it was peaceful, wealthy, and prosperous,—"I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." The evils which the Prophet foresees and foretells, are all in the future. But from the fourth chapter onwards, we are in the midst of confusion and chaos, the result of the terrible storms which sweep over the nation after Jeroboam's death. Hosea gives us a vivid picture of these troublous times. He tells us of conspiracy, assassination, regicide; "They have set up kings, but not by Me"; "All their kings are fallen"; "They have devoured, or they keep devouring, their judges"; "By swearing and lying and killing and committing adultery." To the Prophet it seems a universal reign of perjury, fraud, violence, and bloodshed. Immoralities of all kinds are rife in private life. Drunkenness, dishonesty, burglary, uncleanness, debauchery, highway robbery; for "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding"; "They break into houses"; "Troops of robbers wait for a man." In these crimes all classes of society are implicated. Even the priests are accused of murdering and robbing those who came up to worship at the sanctuaries. "The company of priests murder in the way to Shechem, yea, they commit lewdness." "Like people, like priest," says Hosea; and, this being the case, we need not wonder when we hear a scathing indictment of the religious worship of the time which to the Prophet seems nothing but sheer idolatry and licentiousness. "My people ask counsel at their stocks." "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone." We cannot read these chapters of Hosea without seeing that the condition of things is desperate, hopeless; aye, and the people know it themselves. In their despair they turn first to one quarter and then to another for assistance, anywhere, everywhere, except to the true source of help, except to Jehovah, by the way of repentance and reformation. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian; yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." There was a party in Samaria that wanted to make terms with the king of Assyria, to escape from the doom which was hanging over the head of Israel, by a timely submission and surrender of independence; there was another faction which was intriguing with Egypt, that broken reed, indulging in the vain hope that the great southern power would come at the last moment to the rescue. "Ephraim is like a silly dove, without heart, without understanding; they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria."

First one of these parties and then the other is in the ascendant, and they waste what little strength they have left in conspiracy, intrigue, and cabal. The time for repentance and reform is past, says Hosea, the day of grace is gone, the days of visitation are come; the days of recompense are come; the catastrophe cannot long be delayed; "They have sown the wind, they must reap the whirlwind." "Samaria shall become desolate, for she hath rebelled against her God, they shall fall by the sword."

Such was the condition of Samaria and its people, when the last, but not the least, of its Prophets delivered his message. What an awful, what a heartbreaking time for a Prophet to have to live and labour in, and for a man like Hosea, too; no stranger like Amos, but one who loved Israel with the love of a true patriot a man of the deepest

and tenderest sympathies, whose affection for his country was only less than his fidelity to Jehovah. Oh, if we could only understand him better. I am sure our own hearts would beat with a little answering sympathy if we could only put ourselves in imagination alongside of this noble, high-souled, tender-hearted man, standing out alone in the midst of this moral chaos, amid sights and sounds which must have shocked and sickened him, lifting his voice and pleading with all the passionate earnestness of his nature, with a people too hardened and callous to heed or even to hear him. For his ministry meets with no response, with nothing but opposition and ridicule. "The Prophet is a fool," they say, "the spiritual man is mad," until he himself is almost driven mad by his despair.

Every one who tries to read Hosea is repelled at first by the ruggedness of the style; it is difficult, it is abrupt, it is obscure. But this is because the prophecy is one long cry of anguish. As the outlook becomes gloomier and gloomier, as the hopelessness of reform is more and more apparent, as the certainty of destruction forces itself upon the Prophet's soul, his language reflects his deep emotion, his utterances are broken, his voice is choked with sobs; sorrow, amazement, indignation, horror, and tenderness escape his lips in rapid and changeful succession. But it is all to no purpose; there is no impression made; there is no response; they do not know, they will not know, Who their true Saviour is. "O Israel, thy destruction is that thou hast been against Me, against thy help." No, "Like a silly dove they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." It is no wonder that the language is abrupt, the transitions rapid, and the meaning sometimes doubtful; but we may make allowances, may we not, when we realize that this is due to the sympathy of the Prophet, a sympathy which makes him feel intensely for and with his people in their desperate plight, but a sympathy which enables him to enter, too, into the feelings of the Divine Father of Israel, to put himself in Jehovah's place, if we may say so, to realize how the ingratitude and apostasy of Israel must affect the God of Israel; for it is a characteristic of this Prophet, which some of you may have noticed, to sink his own personality, to identify himself with Jehovah. Only in the first section do we find the familiar words, "Thus saith the Lord." Afterwards, with scarcely an exception, it is Jehovah Himself that we hear pleading and reasoning with Israel; Jehovah Himself denouncing, exhorting, and yearning over His people. But as Hosea draws towards the end of his ministry, he becomes calmer. It is like a peaceful sunset at the close of a stormy day. The doom of Israel is inevitable, but out of the darkness of judgment shines, as in Amos, the bright star of hope. Hosea, too, is confident that the punishment is remedial, that it will purify like fire; he, too, sees that out of the travail pangs of judgment a new people will be born. The iniquity of Ephraim is boundless, his sin is hid, the sorrows of a travailing woman are come upon him; but, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death." And so the tempestuous agitation of the middle section changes to the beautiful, peaceful, and quiet expectation of a regenerate and God-fearing Israel, with which the prophecy closes. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

If I may speak for myself, I cannot help feeling, when I read the prophecy of Hosea in the light which modern scholarship has thrown upon it, and when I try to realize the condition of things under which he lived and worked, to me there is scarcely a more pathetic incident in all human history than this man, with his heart overflowing with love and tenderness and sympathy, appealing with passionate earnestness to a disobedient and gainsaying people who stopped their ears like the deaf adder and would not hear, pouring out his soul in vain, and making no impression, finding no response, yet never losing faith in God, never losing hope, never yielding to despair. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem from death; O death, where are thy plagues; O grave, where is thy destruction?"

If you have followed me so far, you will, I think, be prepared to hear that Hosea penetrates far more deeply than Amos does into the character of God. He too exhorts Israel to seek the Lord, as Amos did, to know the Lord, His nature, His will, His purpose. There is no knowledge of God in the land. "My people," he says, "are destroyed for lack of this knowledge." "It is time," he says, "to seek the Lord." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Yes, "to know the Lord"; that is the whole duty of man. "Israel shall say unto Thee, my God, we know Thee." But Hosea does not stop with that knowledge of God which Amos requires, that know-

ledge of Jehovah as a righteous God, Who requires righteousness and justice in His worshippers. He is not content to cry, with Amos, "Cease your ritual service and do justice"; "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a never dying stream." For him the deepest thing in religion, in life, is the Fatherly love and kindness of Jehovah for Israel His son. He sees that what Jehovah requires from His people is the love of their hearts, in response to the love He has lavished on them. "I desire mercy," *i.e.*, kindness, love, "and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." To know Jehovah is to know Him as a tender Father Who, when Israel was a child, loved him, and out of Egypt called His son. A Father Who taught Israel as a child to walk, holding them by their arms, Who drew them to Himself with human cords, with the cords of a man, with the bands of love. It is characteristic of the difference between the two Prophets, that in Amos this word mercy, kindness, love, never occurs, while in Hosea it not only expresses the truest, deepest relation of man to God, but with him love and truth, love and justice, are the whole duty of man. "Sow to yourself in righteousness, reap in mercy or love"; "Turn thou to thy God, keep mercy and judgment."

Again and again does Hosea appeal to Israel as Jehovah's child, His only son; but, alas, Israel is an unwise child, a foolish son, who will not listen or respond to the love of his Father. Yes, and to bring out more clearly and distinctly this bond of union between Jehovah and His people, Hosea represents it, you will perhaps remember, in the earlier part of his prophecy, under another figure, the figure of the love of a husband for his unfaithful wife, a love which persists and perseveres in spite of constant and repeated acts of infidelity; the Prophet himself, so it seems, goes through this experience, he himself endures the pangs of unrequited love. Why? What does it mean, that strange story? We have seen that Hosea identifies himself with Jehovah. We have seen that by his intense sympathy, he is able to see things as God sees them, to feel as the Father feels, to put himself in the place of God, and so, by this personal experience of infidelity, he realizes something of what Jehovah feels through the long persistent hopeless infidelity of His people Israel. This is the true key to Hosea. Yes, fidelity to Jehovah, the fidelity of a loving wife to her husband, of a loving child to his father, that is the natural attitude of Israel, that should be the relation of Israel to their God and their Father, Who has loved so tenderly, and borne so patiently with His wilful, disobedient, and rebellious people. We are almost startled when we see how nearly this Prophet of Israel has anticipated the revelation of God in Christ, the teaching of the Gospel on the Fatherhood of God, the doctrine that God is love. "When Israel was a child, I loved him," "I taught him to walk, holding him by the arms." "I drew him by human cords, with the bands of love." Israel is an unwise, a foolish son. Israel must be punished; yes, but it goes to Jehovah's heart, if we may say so, to inflict the punishment. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" It is not a long step from this to the parable of the prodigal son. And when the work of punishment is done, how gladly will He redeem them, and restore them to life and favour again. I will ransom them, I will redeem them. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away."

Does Hosea stand alone among the Prophets in this deep insight into the very heart of God? Surely not, though perhaps none of them surpass or even equal him in his power of sympathy, and perhaps no book of the Old Testament is so thoroughly saturated as Hosea with this love of God; but we recall not a few passages of Isaiah where the same note is struck. One I will quote, because it is little known or understood, which shows that Isaiah was at one with our Prophet in his knowledge of the character of God. I owe its interpretation to Dr. A. Smith's book on Isaiah. It occurs in chapter xxxi., and was spoken when Sennacherib was threatening the Holy City, and its fall seemed imminent. "As birds flying," says Isaiah, "so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem." A little more accuracy in the translation brings out the meaning; it should be, "As little mother birds hovering, so will the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem."

Do you see the figure? We have been watching in spring the hedge where we know there is a nest. Suddenly the mother bird, who has been sitting on a branch close by, flutters off her perch, passes backwards and forwards with flapping wings, that droop nervously towards the nest, over her young. A hawk is in the sky, and, till he disappears, she will hover, the incarnation of motherly anxiety. This is Isaiah's figure. His native city, which he loved, is again in danger. Sennacherib is descending upon her,

and the pity of Isaiah's own heart for her, evil as she was, suggested to him a motherhood of pity in the heart of God. The suggestion God Himself approved. Centuries after, when He assumed our flesh and spoke our language, when He put His love into parables, loving and familiar to our affections, there were none of them more beautiful than that which He uttered over the same city, weeping as He spoke, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, but ye would not."

So deeply do the Prophets of Israel penetrate into the character of God, so do they endeavour to picture it in terms drawn from the most sacred and tender of earthly relationships, so do they tell us there is a motherhood as well as a fatherhood of pity in the heart of God.

How truly, and how beautifully, does the teaching of Hosea supplement and complete the sterner doctrine of Amos. Amos confines himself to that eternal truth which is the very foundation of a religious character, that God is righteous, and must have righteousness in His worshippers. He lays bare, with unsparing hand, the hollowness and shams of a religion which thinks to satisfy God with outward forms of worship, while it is all the while transgressing the first principles of morality. He witnesses to one side of the character of God. Hosea, with a deeper insight, a keener sympathy, a tenderer heart, supplies the motive power of religion and of life, when he draws back the veil which hides the face of God, and reveals that truth which is the very life-blood of our Christianity to-day, "that the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

Joel

BY REV. ISAAC WILLIAMS, B.D.

"The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel."—Joel i. 1.

Great as is the variety in the works of Nature, it is no less so in the treasury of God's Word. Though by one and the same Spirit, and having mainly one end and object, yet each part differs from every other; and this diversity extends throughout; the Prophets, for instance, are quite unlike all the rest; and between the Prophets themselves there is a marked distinction of character. We have seen this in the case of the four great Prophets; the same richness of variety is yet more striking in the twelve lesser or minor Prophets, as they are called. Not to enter into the case of the others, we may observe this in three of them, Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk. Strongly defined are the individual characters of each, as different members of the same body, while all alike are animated by one life and one spirit; or as varied instruments of music made use of by one and the same poet or musician, and chosen as best suited for his purpose, according to the character of his message, or the mind he would convey.

Thus the Prophet Habakkuk is remarkable for very striking figurative expressions, which have become familiar in the mouths of all; *e.g.* "write the vision and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth"; "they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag"; "the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it"; "He will make my feet like hinds' feet"; "the just shall live by his faith"; "although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines," and the like, "yet will I rejoice in the Lord." "The Lord is in His holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." With these are peculiarly vivid short poetic images, as "God came from Teman"; "He stood and measured the earth"; "the mountains saw Thee"; "the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high"; "the sun and moon stood still . . . at the sight of Thine arrows they went." All this is quite peculiar to Habakkuk; and hence his single sayings are so treasured and remembered.

But Micah is the one of all the Prophets chosen to foretell the place of our Lord's birth, Bethlehem Ephrata; being well situated for that purpose, not only as by him our Lord declares the nature of Evangelical righteousness, of mercy being better than sacrifice, but because Micah associates the mercies of the Incarnate Son of God with pastoral scenes, well meet for the herald of Bethlehem, with the hills especially

of the Sacred Land. As in the Lesson for to-day, "Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy." We are impressed with the majesty of "the everlasting hills," and think as we read of all those Holy mountains which God has made the places of His teaching or His wonders:—the Mount Sinai where the voice of God was heard; the Mountains of Moab with the vision of Balaam; Mount Pisgah with that of Moses; Mount Horeb with the still small voice speaking to Elijah; Mount Carmel with Elijah's prayer; Gilead, his birth-place, the mount of healing; Mount Sion, of holiness; the dew of Mount Hermon in the sorrows of David; the Mountain also of the Beatitudes; and Tabor, the Mount of the Transfiguration; and the Mount of Olives with the discourse on the Day of Judgment: and after all these we cannot but add the Mount Calvary. These, "the strong foundations of the earth," stand around, like witnesses of God, as He comes to plead with His people, and appeal to what He has done for them. With Micah the Christian Kingdom is "the mountain of the Lord's house, established above the mountains." Such is the proclaimer of Bethlehem, the place of flocks; the Prophet of the new law of Christ, the love of mercy, and humble walk with God. His expressions and images are from the field and forest,—of the "mourning owl," and "wailing dragon," and "the bald eagle," and the "noise of the flock"; the Gospel is the rest under the shadow of the fig-tree and the vine; while the remnant of Jacob is "as a dew from the Lord, as showers upon the grass," or as "the flock dwelling solitary in the wood of Carmel." The Prophet himself is "as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleaners of the vintage, there is no cluster to eat," while his "soul desireth the first-ripe fruit." Thus speaks the Prophet Micah where Jeremiah, in his own characteristic language, says, "where is the love of thine espousals?"

But how different to this is the Prophet Joel; one object fills his mind from first to last, one object in which he is altogether wrapt; no little sentences of wisdom like Habakkuk, who might be called the Prophet of faith; no rural images like Micah, who might be termed the Prophet of mercy, but one absorbing spirit throughout; and the question is not about expressions, but about the meaning and intent of them. He is beyond all others, and it might be said, solely and entirely the Prophet of Judgment. He is full of the trumpet; it is in all he says; the trumpet of Mount Sinai is there, the trumpet of war, the trumpet of calling assemblies, the trumpet to be heard at the last great Day. So that our Church on Ash Wednesday, when she would call on all her people to prepare for judgment, has the Prophet Joel read from the Altar instead of the Epistle; and on the great Day of Pentecost itself, the first sermon ever preached in the Christian Church is the declaration of St. Peter in the words of the Prophet Joel. The Prophet supplies not only the text, but the sermon. And what is the prevailing tone of this Prophet? "The day," "Alas for the day! the day of the Lord," "the day of the Lord great and very terrible"; this is, throughout, his burden. It is one voice, one character, one solemn loud appeal through the whole. No pleasant instrument, as Ezekiel; no pastoral voice, as Micah; no dark sentences upon the harp, as Habakkuk, but the trumpet alone.

But when we come to the detail, and the explanation of particulars, what are we to consider the exact subject of this Prophet? it is, but more especially at the beginning, the description of a plague of locusts; such as occurs in eastern countries; the sun is hidden by them, it is "a day of darkness and of gloominess"; "as the morning spread upon the mountains"; "the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness"; "Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble." The description is most exact and striking in all its parts. But there is evidently allusion to another subject throughout; another and heavier judgment about to come is associated with the description, and that is the army of the Chaldeans. "A nation is come up upon my land, strong and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion." There was one judgment close at hand, that of the locusts; and there was another yet to come after that, far severer and more enduring, the desolation and captivity of Judah; but yet the Prophet speaks as if they were not two distinct things, but one, though in time far apart. The very description itself of the locusts, close and accurate as it is, is at the same time figurative and allegorical of an armed host. In detailing one it fortells the other. Nor is this all; it cannot be so. For we may notice that through the whole there occasionally occur expressions too great for either

of these fulfilments, or any thing of a temporal character. It is throughout the great and terrible day of the Lord coming and nigh at hand, "and who can abide it?" In confirmation of which we know that our Blessed Saviour Himself, in His description of the Day of Judgment on the Mount of Olives, takes these expressions of the signs in Heaven from the Prophet Joel, and says they are then to be fulfilled. And St. Peter likewise, on the Day of Pentecost, explains these passages in Joel to be the solemn call to repentance before the coming of the Great Day, bringing forward those words to which our Lord had before referred;—"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible Day of the Lord come." And St. John, in the Revelation describing the last days, adduces the like expressions from this Prophet: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come get you down, for the press is full." These are the words of the Prophet Joel, but in the Revelation St. John mentions this as the saying of the Angel, when "one like unto the Son of Man" descends, sitting upon a cloud, and having "in His hand a sharp sickle." The Angel says, "Thrust in thy sickle and reap; for the time is come." And again another Angel cries with a loud voice, "Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine." Then follows in Joel a still more distinct mention of the judgment, "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision: for the Day of the Lord is near."

Now this introducing into the same description many judgments is much to be observed, because it is the case usually in the Bible, with a particular purpose of God, that more than one thing is contained in the same prophecy;—one near and soon to happen, the other more distant; one of things temporal, the other of things eternal. It is the case in our Lord's account of the Day of Judgment; He speaks at the same time of His coming in the fall of Jerusalem, and at the end of the world. Thus the prophecy of Jacob is of some things just about to be, and some after a long time, and some not till the last days. And these descriptions of Joel some explain only of the Babylonian army; others, of the locusts only; others, only of the Last Day; and hence the confusion of interpretation, for it is in fact of all. The vision indeed is but one scene, though it combines many things—the locusts, the Chaldean army, the array of the last Coming. The events are differing in time, for speaking in the Spirit of God he partakes of the Eternal, and knows not distinction of days; differing in circumstances, but partaking of one character, for they are all of one judgment of God; many judgments indeed as men behold them, but all leading unto one, and blending into one, and perfected in one, the full and final retribution of God.

Our Blessed Saviour sometimes speaks of things separate in point of time as if they were equally present to Him. For time is short and eternity is long. So is it throughout the Scripture; so will it be with us when released from the body; so even now so far as we partake of the mind of God.

Now the object of thus mixing up things together is partly for the sake of the prophecy itself, that when men see that one sense has been fulfilled, it may be a pledge and earnest to them of the other also. But this is not the only purpose; for it is likewise to teach us that the events of life, even now, to those who will attend to them, do prepare the way and give signals and notes of preparation for the last end of all things; and things are fulfilled in each one of us even now which foretell and foreshadow the great and general consummation. Thus, to take an instance which may come home to us all, some are perplexed in explaining the Scriptural account which speaks of the coming of the Last Day, as speedy and sudden; or of some particular circumstances in that description, as of the failure of the Sun, Moon, and Stars. But each living soul, as he passes through this earthly scene, has a sort of fulfilment of this in himself: for life always seems very short when it is gone, and death always sudden when it has come to each; the sun and the moon being hidden from him, and the stars falling, has in each one of us a fulfilment, when at death this temporal visible scene, this course of night and day, this world in which we behold the sun, moon, and stars, is for ever at an end as far as we are concerned, and our eyes open upon another world which has neither the sun nor moon to lighten it. In the case of each one of us, it is true that "the night is far spent, the day is at hand"; in each it is fulfilled, "Behold I come quickly, and My reward is with Me"; "the sun and moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall not give their light"; "then shall ye see the Son of Man." I do not mean to say that this is the meaning of those sayings, but that thus on a smaller scale

we may know that so much is fulfilled among us daily as to keep our faith alive and wakeful respecting the great things foretold of the future.

Another instance of the like kind may be mentioned; when alarmed at any extraordinary visitation men have always been apt to think that the Great Day has come; it is no doubt so intended of God that they should so connect things, and in all His judgments be led to consider the great and the last of all. Now this is what He does here by the Prophet Joel. And how trumpet-like, how awakening and alarming throughout is the whole style and strain of this His inspired herald! Some characters are naturally capable of a more sustained and intense contemplation of the great Hereafter than others; and this Prophet seems to have been such. Thus when Micah says, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares," Joel on the contrary speaks of their "Beating their plowshares into swords," which is like our Lord's own expression, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword"; "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." As if saying, now is the time for every effort. All is as the season of watching, of earnest preparation, for "the hour is come," "the Day is at hand."

Before concluding, another remarkable point must be mentioned in the Prophet Joel, which is a voice of joy and exultation that is combined throughout with the terrible theme, and pervades each subject of his prophecy. First, when God shall "restore the years which the locusts have eaten"; and, secondly, when on the Day of Pentecost the Spirit shall be poured on all flesh for the restoration of the world; on both of which occasions there occur expressions far beyond any temporal fulfilment; but lastly and more than all, in what is yet to be when the harvest shall have come; when the sun and moon shall fail, but "the Lord shall be the strength of His people," rejoicing over "the remnant which the Lord shall call."

Now in noticing the character of this Prophet this circumstance also is full of instruction, as showing that the more we are impressed with a serious expectation of the Great Day, the more shall we be able to look forward to it with joy and comfort. Some have felt this at the near approach of death; so much so that afterwards, on an unexpected recovery, when again taken up by the world, they have complained of losing that peace and joy which they had experienced even at the sight of the King of Terrors, and have missed that light which was around their Lord's presence when He appeared to them in the valley of the shadow of death.

Look always to the Great Day of the Lord, as St. John did, and you will be able to say with him, "Even so come!"

Joel

BY REV. AUBREY L. MOORE, M.A.

"Rend your heart, and not your garments," etc.—Joel ii. 13.

What do we know about Joel? Who was he? When did he live? Whom did he prophesy for? What was his prophecy all about? Only three chapters remain. What are they to teach us? How are they to be "profitable," as all Scripture should be? How are they to serve for instruction in righteousness?

Let us start by assuming that we all believe in prophecy; that is, that God has used human lips to foreshadow His Almighty purposes. Obviously, if we do not admit this, we shall have to take one of two well-worn paths. Either we must say that every allusion to events later than the assumed date of the book is merely an accidental coincidence, and was otherwise meant by the writer; or else we must say the allusions are so clear and startling that we must reconsider that date, and suppose the writer lived when his prophecies were not prophecies at all. Neither of these methods are necessary for those who believe in prophecy, and to such we may simply state the results of careful and critical inquiry. "Joel, the son of Pethuel," sums up all we know of the man. His personality disappears behind his message. Like St. John the Baptist, he is a voice speaking the words of God. If we compare the three chapters of Joel with the other Prophets, we find that they have become a sort of classical literature, quoted continually and referred to as well known and authenticated. This is especially the case with the prophecy of Amos, who begins and ends with quotations from Joel. Now we know that Amos lived in the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah, and Jeroboam II., King of

Israel; that is to say, about 800 years before Christ (B.C. 810—784), and both allude to the sin of Tyre and Sidon in selling the children of Judah into captivity. In all probability, then, Joel was an elder contemporary of Amos, and lived during the period which succeeded the reign of the idolatrous Amaziah.

When we turn to the prophecy itself, we find it falls into two natural divisions. The first is an exhortation to repentance, the second a promise that God will receive and bless the penitent nation.

The Prophet begins with a terrible picture of desolation. Not one scourge only but many are sweeping over the land. "That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten, and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten, and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten." This is prophecy, not history, though it might have been suggested by an actual plague of locusts. The insects mentioned here—the palmer-worm, the locust, the canker-worm, the caterpillar—are really four distinct kinds of locusts. But it is a well-known fact in natural history that different species of locusts never follow the same line of march, for the simple reason that the plague which first comes leaves no vegetation for new insects to feed upon. Therefore we are led to suppose that under the image of different kinds of locusts the Prophet foretells the invaders which shall come upon Judah. And this is the more probable from the fact that he speaks of these invaders as a nation (i. 6.) "strong and numberless, with teeth like the teeth of a lion, and as a great northern army" (ii. 20), whereas the plague of locusts always entered Judæa from the south or south-west in their passage from the desert of Arabia. More than this, their coming is accompanied by fire. They not only eat up the vegetation, and lay waste the vines and bark the fig-trees (i. 7), but they burn up everything with fire. "A fire devourer, before them, and behind them a flame burneth," and that which is as the garden of Eden becomes a desolate wilderness. They approach with noise as of horses and chariots; they run like mighty men, and scale the city-walls; they march in regular and unbroken order and break into the houses, and climb through the windows like a thief. Here, then, is a prophetic picture of the great northern army of Assyria, which in the time of Joel was hardly known, but is seen by him afar off. It is the first scourge which desolates the Holy City, but not the last. "What the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten, and that which the locust hath left hath the canker-worm eaten, and that which the canker-worm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten." So did Assyria, Chaldæa, Macedonia, and Rome in turn desolate the land of Judah. And what are the people to do in the presence of this accession of invaders, each one more terrible and destructive than the former. The Prophet, seeing already the scourge of the Lord, bids the men of Judah to repent and turn to the Lord. Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God. The Day of the Lord cometh and is nigh at hand (ii. 1), that day of punishment so often threatened, so often withheld—because God is the Lord and changeth not in His loving purposes. Those four terrible scourges are coming upon the land, like four devastating armies of locusts, if in the order of nature such a thing were possible. Surely the Lord is now about to destroy the Holy City, as He marches in the van of the invading hosts and "utters His voice before the army" (ii. 11). But no! in the midst of darkness and confusion, while the heavens tremble and the sun, moon, and stars withdraw their shining, and all faces of men gather blackness, and it seems as if there were no escape from a terrible and final destruction, the echo of those words is heard again—"I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." There is a sudden change comes over the Prophet's vision. Hitherto all had been dark and gloomy and hopeless. There is humiliation, it is true, and confusion, but no sure proof that it is not too late to stay the righteous judgment of the Lord. But in the very midst of the prophecy of woe, the words of loving kindness are heard from the goodness of the Lord Himself: "Therefore also now" (ii. 12), "saith the Lord, Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and weeping and mourning. And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Who knoweth if He will return and repent and leave a blessing behind Him?" Henceforward the prophecy is full of hope and joy. It is the answer of the Lord to a penitent nation: "Fear not! I will drive away the northern army. The withered vines shall shoot again, the ravages of the invading locusts shall be doubly restored, and the Spirit of the Lord shall be poured forth on all flesh." Not on Judah only, but on all those who are His children.

So a prophetic vision, through the mists of a narrow and limited conception of God's love, breaks forth—the glorious vision of a Catholic Church: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Then shall be a day of righteous retribution. Then shall the nations, the forces of the world, be gathered together, those who have oppressed the people of God and those who derided their Messianic hopes. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." In the valley of Jehoshaphat, whose name signifies "God judgeth"—in that valley through which flows the brook Kedron, so well known in sacred story—there, amidst the graves of the inhabitants of Jerusalem—there, where the garden of the Lord's Agony was seen, where Judas betrayed, and the soldiers assaulted the Lord of Heaven and earth—the valley overlooked on the one side by Olivet, where the Saviour wept over the Holy City, on the other by the Temple, so soon to be profaned: there all sacred tradition declares, and prophecy seems to hint, shall that same Jesus Who was taken up descend in like manner to judge the world of the ungodly. There is a terrible appropriateness in the scene. An old writer has vividly drawn out for us the speaking silence of that place. "Here did I endure grief for you; here, at Gethsemane, I poured out My soul in agony; here was I betrayed and bound and dragged over Kedron into the city; hard by this valley, in the house of Caiaphas and of Pilate, I was judged for you and condemned to death, crowned with thorns, buffeted, mocked, and spat upon; here led through the city, bearing a Cross, I was crucified on Mount Calvary, and offered Myself for you a sacrifice to God. Behold the hands ye pierced. Ye have despised My toils and sufferings which I bore for you, and now, in the self-same place, I am come as Judge of quick and dead, to receive for ever to Myself those who lived the life of faith, the patriarchs who saw Me afar off, the once sinful Israel who have turned with penitence and fasting at My punishments, the Prophets who shone as stars in the darkness, the Apostles who declared My name—the name of a suffering Lord, the priests of God in all ages who lived only to sign men with the sign of the Cross, the faithful in all the world who have lived and wrought for Me."

That is the end of the prophecy of Joel—a scene of decision, sharp, stern, everlasting separation of the Church of Christ from the kingdom of Anti-Christ. And Judah, the people of God throughout the world, shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem, the hope of His universal Church, from generation to generation.

One word, brethren, of practical warning may we gather from this hasty summary of the teaching of the Prophet Joel. It begins with darkness and gloom and desolation, and ends with victory and joy and exaltation. Has God changed? No. "I am the Lord, I change not"; but there is a passage room of penitence which leads from darkness unto day—when the people learn to rend their hearts and not their garments, and turn to the Lord their God. Then is the darkness dispelled, and the great northern army scattered, and the trees of the field break forth into singing, and Jerusalem becomes once more a delightful land. God's dealings with His people are unchanging. He is ready to save them to the uttermost if they will repent and live. Even when His anger is being poured out, when host after host of invaders comes upon the sinful people, yet even then a Joel's voice is raised full of promises to them who repent; full of awful warning to the unrepentant when he speaks of the "multitudes in the valley of decision." We in this land, a part, as we believe of God's holy people, are suffering for our own and our fathers' sins. Jerusalem, the one united Church, has been rent asunder—that is the first scourge, but it is not the last. Schism and heresy are rife among us, and are daily destroying their thousands, by breaking up the unity of God's revelation by His Son. What the palmer-worm hath left, hath the locust eaten. Is that all? No; infidelity and open vice come in to complete the ruin that our divisions have begun. Not only are the leaves stripped from the trees, and the beauty of that undivided Church destroyed which should have witnessed for God, but the very life of the trees is attacked by the devastating enemies—and all the while we English Churchmen do not mourn, do not sanctify a fast, and turn ourselves in weeping to the Lord; but with an ill-timed optimism we think all will come right, and talk calmly and unmoved of that great gathering of "multitudes in the valley of decision," when the mountains shall hear the Lord's controversy, and the Lord shall judge and defend the cause of His children. Yet God's visitations, in this life, at all events are never punishments only; they have a mission, a work to do for Him, or rather for *us*. To rend the garments is an easy thing, to be sorry and vexed and troubled at the evils which God sends, but to see in them a purpose, and to welcome it as a proof of love and longsuffering, is a far harder thing; and to this rending of the heart, to this *penitence*, this sorrow, not for the misery,

but for the *sin* which brought the misery, is the promise declared by the Prophet attached. "Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil."

Jonah

BY VERY REV. A. P. STANLEY, D.D.

"The word of the Lord came unto Jonah."—Jonah i. 1.

The Prophet Jonah, who was to Jeroboam II. what Ahijah had been to Jeroboam I., and what Elisha had been to Jehu, conveys an instruction reaching far beyond his times. The child of the widow of Zarephath, the boy who attended Elijah to the wilderness, the youth who anointed Jehu, was believed to be the same as he whose story is related to us in the book of unknown authorship, of unknown date, of disputed meaning, but of surpassing interest—the Book of Jonah. Putting aside all that is doubtful, it stands out of the history of those wars and conquests with a truthfulness to human nature and a loftiness of religious sentiment that more than vindicate its place in the Sacred Canon. First look at the vivid touches of the narrative even in detail. We see the Prophet hasting down from the hills of Galilee to the one Israelite port of Joppa. He sinks into the deep sleep of the wearied traveller as soon as he gets on board after his hurried journey. The storm rises; the Tyrian sailors are all astir with terror and activity. They attack the unknown passenger with their "brief accumulated inquiries." "Why hath this happened to us? What doest thou? Whence art thou? What is thy country? Of what people art thou?" The good seamen, heathens as they are, struggle against the dreadful necessity which Jonah puts before them. They row with a force which seems to dig up the waves under their efforts. But higher and higher, higher and higher, the sea surges against them, like a living creature gaping for its prey. The victim is at last thrown in, and its rage ceases. This is the first deliverance, and it is the Divine blessing on the honest hearts and active hands of "those that go down to the sea in ships, and do their business in great waters."

Then comes the unexpected rescue of the Prophet. He vanishes from view for three long days and nights. One of the huge monsters which are described in the Psalms as always sporting in the strange sea, and which in the early Christian paintings is represented as a vast dragon, receives him into his capacious maw. His own hymn of thanksgiving succeeds. He seems to be in the depths of the unseen world; the river of the ocean whirls him round in its vast eddies; the masses of seaweed enwrap him as in grave-clothes; the rocky roots of the mountains as they descend into the sea appear above him, as if closing the gates of earth against his return. The mighty fish is but the transitory instrument. That on which the Prophet in his hymn lays stress is not the mode of his escape, but the escape itself.

The third deliverance is that of Nineveh. The great city rises before us, most magnificent of all the capitals of the ancient world—"great even unto God." It included parks, and gardens, and fields, and people and cattle, within its vast circumference. Twenty miles the Prophet penetrates into the city. He had still finished only one-third of his journey through it. His utterance, like that of the wild Preacher in the last days of the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, is one piercing cry, from street to street and square to square. It reaches at last the king on his throne of state. The remorse for the wrong and robbery and violence of many generations is awakened. The dumb animals are included, after the fashion of the East, in the universal mourning, and the Divine decree is revoked.

Of this revocation, and of the lessons of the whole book, the concentrated force is contained in the closing scene. The Prophet sits in his rude hut outside the Eastern gate, under the shade of the broad leaves of the flowering shrub, the rapid produce of the night. With the scorching blast of the early morning the luxuriant shelter withers away, and in his despairing faintness he receives the revelation of the Divine character, which is to him as that of the Burning Bush to Moses, or of the Vision on Horeb to Elijah, and which sums up the whole of his own history.

He has been shown to us as one of the older Prophetic school, denouncing, rebuking, moving to and fro, without fixed habitation, like Elijah, flying from kingdom to king-

dom, as if on the wings of the wind. Here we have embarked, for the first time in the sacred history, on the stormy waters of the Mediterranean, in a ship bound for the distant Tarshish on the coast of Spain. On the other side, we traverse, for the first time, the vast desert, and find ourselves in the heart of the great Assyrian capital. Jonah is the first Apostle, though involuntary and unconscious, of the Gentiles. The inspiration of the Gentile world is acknowledged in the prophecy of Balaam, its nobleness in the Book of Job, its greatness in the reign of Solomon. But its distinct claims on the justice and mercy of God are first recognised in the Book of Jonah. It is the cry of the good heathen that causes the sea "to cease from her raging." It is the penitence of the vast population of the heathen Nineveh that arouses the Divine pity even for the innocent children and the dumb, helpless cattle.

And this lesson is still more forcibly brought out by contrast with the conduct of the Israelite Prophet in whose timidity and selfishness is seen the same degeneracy that has already marked the descent from Elisha to Gehazi. He, indeed, is delivered, but "so as by fire." In the Prophet's despondency, which swerves aside from the heavy duty imposed upon him, many a coward spirit that shrinks from the call of truth and duty starts to see its true likeness. In the return of the tempest-tossed soul, *de profundis*, to the task which has now become welcome—in the long-sustained effort to which at last he winds himself up, is the same encouragement that was needed even by an Apostle—"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" But most of all is the warning thrust home in the rebuke to the narrow selfishness which could lament over the withering of his own bower, and yet complain that the judgment had not been carried out against the penitent empire of Nineveh. "More than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left," the Prophet had desired to see sacrificed to his preconceived notions of the necessities of a logical theory, or to the destruction of his country's enemies. "It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. I pray Thee, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? . . . Therefore take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." Better (so it has often been said by Jonah's successors) to die, than that unbaptized infants should be saved—than that the reprobate should repent—than that God's threatenings should ever be revoked—than that the solemnity of life should be disturbed by the restoration of the thousands who have had no opportunity of knowing the Divine will—than that God should at last "be all in all." He sat under the shadow of his booth, still hoping, believing for the worst, "till he might see what would become of the city."

In the scorching blast that beat upon the head of Jonah, when he "fainted and wished himself to die," and with a sharp cry repeated, in the pangs of his own destitution, what he had before murmured only as a theological difficulty, the sacred narrative leaves him. In the popular traditions of East and West, Jonah's name alone has survived the lesser Prophets of the Jewish Church. It still lives, not only in many a Mussulman tomb along the coasts and hills of Syria, but in the thoughts and devotions of Christendom. The marvellous escape from the deep, through a single passing allusion in the Gospel history, was made an emblem of the deliverance of Christ Himself from the jaws of death and the grave. The great Christian doctrine of the boundless power of human repentance received its chief illustration from the repentance of the Ninevites at the preaching of Jonah. There is hardly any figure from the Old Testament which the early Christians in the Catacombs so often took as their consolation in persecution as the deliverance of Jonah on the seashore, and his naked form stretched out in the burning sun beneath the sheltering gourd. But these all conspire with the story itself in proclaiming that still wider lesson of which I have spoken. It is the rare protest of theology against the excess of theology—it is the faithful delineation, through all its varied states, of the dark, sinister, selfish side of even great religious teachers. It is the grand Biblical appeal to the common instincts of humanity, and to the universal love of God, against the narrow dogmatism of sectarian polemics. There has never been a "generation" which has not needed the majestic revelation of sternness and charity, each bestowed where most deserved and where least expected in the "sign of the Prophet Jonah."

Jonah

BY REV. EDWARD S. TEAD.

"The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai," etc.—Jonah i. 1-17.

This little biography begins with the announcement that God asked man to do something for Him. The Book might have begun with accounts of Jonah's ancestry and family or with stories about his boyhood and youth, but these are passed by in haste to enter upon the narrative of his life at the point where the first great call of duty came to him.

I. IT TELLS OF A SPECIAL MISSION TO AN OUTSIDE PEOPLE.

The Old Testament is for the most part occupied with God's dealings with Israel. The commandments, ordinances, providential dealings are of Israel. It is a record of God's training of, and forbearance with, a nation specially loved. And what we know of the great heathen world comes to us through Israel's contact with it in journey or battle. The story before us is not a history of Jonah,—little is said of him,—but rather an account of a mission to a great heathen city. "Every notice of the Prophet is omitted except what bears on that mission." The narrative of the Scriptures turns aside from its usual course to tell us of God's dealings with an outside nation—a people without a Bible, without prophets, dwelling in the darkness of ignorance and vice, "dead in trespasses and sin." Jehovah said: "Their wickedness is come up before Me." It had grown rank and reared its terrible front before the Throne of God. And yet the mission of God contemplated the Ninevites as moral, accountable beings, as still within reach of truth and capable of receiving and acting on appeals made to their consciences. Their wickedness which had gone up before God was worthy of punishment. There was no reason why sentence should not be passed upon them.

The Ninevites sinned against the moral law within them with as much persistence as do the heathen to-day; and as the years went by their trespasses became more wanton and aggravated. But no matter how grievously the heathen sin, they still retain their capacity to acquire holiness. In view of the iniquity of the Ninevites, the message given to them is interesting. Jonah was told to cry against them; and farther on we learn what the cry was, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The message, therefore, was severe. Destruction, retribution—this was the word that was first uttered in their hearing; a word setting clearly before them the legitimate consequence of their sinful lives; a word which implied the moral assent of the hearer.

II. JONAH'S TREATMENT OF HIS MISSION.

If his name, which means "dove," was any indication of his character, then we may imagine that the mission was anything but agreeable to his shrinking, gentle disposition, for such a stern message required a courageous heart and a willing tongue. His instantaneous refusal shows how preposterous the errand seemed to him. The call must have come to him as an interruption. The duty was suddenly laid upon him as he was quietly living at his home. Necessarily his own plans and pleasures would have to be given up. Family and friends must be left behind. It was a hazardous work among an alien people in a distant country. Evidently the mission was given to him at a time when he was not in a mood to receive it. Before this he had exercised his functions as Prophet and, during the reign of Jeroboam II., had uttered a word of comfort at a critical time. But never had he been asked to perform a work equal to this or one involving so many unpleasant features.

The city to which he was sent was great in its wealth and renown. To attempt to counteract the influences there dominant would seem to be impossible. How did he know but that they might kill him and cast him out of their streets? Would he not be a laughing-stock? It was too much for his feeble faith to think that he alone could make an impression on that city, and he turned and ran away.

But flight or neglect does not lessen the demand upon us. There is something pitiless and almost vengeful in the way neglected duty hangs to us. We may put miles between us and it; months, years may seem to leave it far behind in the past, and yet we can not shake its hold upon us. It lives as long as we do. The time which Jonah spent in fleeing from his duty was time that belonged to Nineveh for repentance. No

other Prophet was sent to them to take Jonah's place. Hence disobedience of individual duty is really selfishness. Our misspent time or neglect of duty, our procrastination or wilful disobedience are often at the cost of some one's else welfare. Our own estimate of our abilities for service or our preferences for special kinds of service are not always to be considered. The bugbears and obstacles which our fears create have no real existence. God wants men to do His work who will allow Him to help, who will be willing to consult His wisdom and receive His guidance. We should, therefore, take this into consideration when a hard task is given us to do. Our own individual powers are only part of our equipment. God's powers must also be reckoned in.

III. THE DISASTROUS EFFECTS OF DISOBEDIENCE TO A DIVINE CALL.

All that followed upon Jonah's refusal to go to Nineveh was unnecessary. The money he paid for his fare was needless expenditure. The time spent in journey was wasted time. Jonah was out of place in Joppa, out of place on board the ship, out of place in the fish's belly. Everything went wrong with him from the moment he began to neglect his duty. The sailors' lives were imperilled by him so long as he remained on board their vessel, for the storm was sent upon them on his account. They had to sacrifice most of the ship's cargo and this was a needless waste of property. The anxieties and fears and labours of the sailors were all unnecessary. A life of disobedience is full of friction and waste. When one is running away from duty or in unknown conflict with the laws of righteousness then the world seems full of disorder. The man cannot find his niche. The world was not made with reference to disobedience any more than the eye was made to accommodate a grain of sand. He will thrust himself in where he can not be of service. This disobedience will interfere with other lives and throw them out of harmony. He will be a source of confusion among his fellows. This is forcibly illustrated by the people whom the state calls criminals, as, for instance, the intemperate, the gambler, the libertine, the thief. These persons cause endless friction and waste in the state, interrupting its harmony and good order. They lay an unnecessary tax upon law-abiding citizens to keep them properly imprisoned or properly restricted. They are a drain upon society and disturb its very existence.

The effect upon Jonah of his disobedience was also to make him indifferent to the dangers brought upon others by his sin. He could sleep in the midst of a storm while others were in terror. Conscience did not keep him awake; or perhaps neglect of duty had put his conscience to sleep. His rejection of duty also took away his desire to pray. When all the others were calling upon their gods he alone was silent, as we have no record that he prayed. He could not enter into communion with God while he was living in known sin. Even when peril came upon him he had no heart to cry for rescue. The consciousness that his calamity was sent upon him as a judgment of God prevented prayer for deliverance, and so the great effect of his transgression was to make him reckless of his own life. Strange, was it not, that he should meet the very thing in his flight from duty which he feared in the performance of it. He was willing to die, and begged his companions to throw him overboard, which they considerately did. What rapid changes disobedience had wrought in him.

There is nothing so destructive in this world as disobedience. A will which refuses to yield to law, whether of man or God, is an evil influence among men. One act of transgression, a refusal to do one duty, throws a soul out of equilibrium, and in time changes the mental, moral, and spiritual character. Radical changes in intellectual or spiritual views of men are generally related to their performance or non-performance of duty. The sudden deterioration in quality of one's principles may be traced often to some secret sin or continued neglect of duty. There is nothing so selfish as sin. Our neglect of any duty which we consider to be only a private affair robs somebody else and increases the responsibility of those already burdened with responsibility. The refusal of members of the Church to give of their substance to the sustaining of missions throws a heavier burden on the few who are willing to give.

If people who ought to work for Christ will not do so, then more work has to be laid upon those who are already in service. The idler not only squanders his own time uselessly but uses up other people's time by making them do what he ought to. If we could only see how much waste our sin causes in the world, we should become obedient for economic reasons, if for no other. The way of peace and prosperity for individual and state alike is the way of obedience. If one imagines that he can sin and have all the results end in himself alone, he is mistaken; for God has so

related our lives by ties of blood and kindship and by the powers of influence that "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." At some unguarded point a man's secret or open disobedience will leap out and injure some one else; and if we would have an individual or a neighbourhood or a state enter into harmony and the highest form of life, then let lawlessness be cast out, and peace will come as quickly as it came to the sea when the sailors cast Jonah into the deep.

Jonah

BY REV. EDWARD B. MASON, D.D.

"The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time," etc.—Jonah iii. 1-10.

It is the opinion of a most reverent and critical Biblical scholar, Dr. Briggs, that "the question whether Jonah is history or fiction is not decided by Jesus' use of it; for as a parable it answers His purpose, no less than if it were history." The Bible is full of allegories. The lessons of an allegory may be as forcible as those of history. Uncle Tom's Cabin is truer and certainly more powerful than most histories. We do not make our Lord's parable of the Prodigal Son more useful or instructive by claiming for it, what He did not claim, that it is a narrative of fact.

Professor Ladd says: "The Book of Jonah, although it was never designed—so we believe—to be considered throughout an historical composition, conveys upon a certain historical basis, in the form of allegory, a most valuable truth. Indeed this Book is in certain regards one of the noblest and most truly inspired of all the Old Testament writings; for it gives a lofty revelation of the Divine love and forgiveness toward all suffering and sinful nations, at a time when there was much darkness of vision on this point even among the most advanced followers of Jehovah. And the great purpose of the Bible is to make God known and felt as the Redeemer of mankind."

"The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time." Luther wondered at the patience of God. He is long-suffering and kind. He is willing to speak not once nor twice, but to call His servants again and again, rising up early and late. This Prophet had learned a lesson. One flight from the presence of the Lord was enough. He had no desire to repeat the experiment. This time he arose and went. He did not stop to confer with flesh and blood. How far he had a new spirit is not certain, but he obeyed. His conduct afterward, when the city was spared, shows that he was still a man of infirmities. He was displeased exceedingly, and expostulated with the Lord, and wanted his life to be taken from him.

The notion that only perfect men are fit to preach the Gospel is here refuted. There are no such men. When at Lystra the multitudes came with oxen and garlands, and would have done sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, the Apostle sprang in among them saying, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We are men of like passions with you." In his epistle to the Philippians he says: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one do it of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the Gospel: but the other proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely, thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds. What then? only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Modern missionaries and ministers are not immaculate people. Fallible, sinful men may and do preach the Gospel, and sometimes preach it gloriously.

"Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." This short sentence demolishes at one blow all forms of sentimental, sensational, and traditional preaching. "For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the Gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ." There is no Gospel worth preaching but that which comes through revelation of Jesus Christ. Men want neither speculation, nor hypothesis, nor fine-spun theory, but the blessed Gospel of the glorious God.

This Gospel, glowing in heavenly light, needs no added attractions to give it a charm and power greater than its own. "Our fine churches are empty; our costly music has fostered a false and critical taste; our elaborate orations are deemed dull and prosy." Strive if you will to make the rainbow beautiful; decorate Ben Lomond, lifting his hoary head above the clouds; add your pretty garlands of rhetoric; brighten

the splendours of the star-lit dome above; paint the lily and adorn the rose; but make no vain and foolish attempt to enchanse the glories and beauties of a divine and blessed Gospel. When you speak of that, be simple and humble, and suffer its heavenly radiance to eclipse your own.

Preachers of this kind will be likely to make little of themselves. They will neither live nor die unto themselves. There will be in all their conduct a noble self-sacrifice. One of them said long ago: "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I rather speak five words with my understanding, than by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." He chose useful rather than brilliant qualities. Plodding industry and humble faithfulness are often enough sneered at, but Paul has left us in no doubt which he preferred, and which in his opinion is the more honourable.

Jonah's sermon was very simple and faithful, with no rhetorical flights. The people who heard it believed not Jonah but God. The Prophet was forgotten. He had only his gourd and his discontent. Neither was very comfortable. He was miserable for a little while, but the misery passed away and left behind it lessons most profitable for prophets and for all men.

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." There is a temptation, felt perhaps by all of us, to continue not only the spirit and manner, but the very substance of Jonah's preaching. We speak as though the New Testament and the Kingdom of God had not come. "In those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa, saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven"—not the kingdom of hell—"is at hand." One greater than John reiterated the message. He also taught that though John was the greatest of the Prophets, "He that is but little in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

God has put a new message into our mouths, the message of John and Jesus, a message of joy and gladness. Angels sang over its announcement. The key-note was given by an Angel that came to Zacharias and said: "Fear not, thy prayer is heard." The Gospel is redemption, not destruction. It is the dawn of day. It is good tidings to all the people. "The Gospel of the Saviour" says Maurice, "began with hymns and ends with praises; and as the thanksgivings of the meek recorded in the first chapter, so in the last, we listen to the gratitude of the faithful." Let us not go back to the Mosaic dispensation; we have what is better. The same command that was laid upon Jonah is laid upon us: "Preach the preaching that I bid thee"; but the preaching bidden now is larger and grander than was bidden then.

The effect of Jonah's preaching was most noticeable. The people believed God. A fast was proclaimed. They humbled themselves and put on sackcloth. The king came down from his throne and sat in ashes. He made a proclamation saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing. Let them cry mightily unto God." Then comes a sentence that of itself lifts the Book of Jonah into a place among the loftiest of the divine revelations. "Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from us His fierce anger, that we perish not?" We may rejoice that now men do know; that the knowledge has gone out into all the world, and is finding its way to every creature. Who has not heard the report that God will certainly repent, and turn away His fierce anger? that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him? This is the preaching to which we are bidden. A great feast is spread and the command is "Go out into the highways and hedges."

The account does not tell us exactly what their repentance was. Putting on sackcloth and ashes is not repentance. Remorse is not repentance. Repentance is turning away from sin; ceasing to do evil; seeking God with the whole heart. It is action, not feeling. Jeremiah explains what repentance is, when he gives us this word from the Lord: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. . . . If it do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them."

All depends on turning from evil. This is what the people of Nineveh did. Such repentance is the pivot of a nation's destiny. When man repents, God seems a new and different Being, but the change is in the creature, not in the Creator. Precisely as we say the sun goes round the world, meaning that the world goes round on its axis, so we say that God repents, meaning that man turns from his wickedness and sees God

under new conditions. As living plants, warmed by the sun's rays, thrive and glow, while dead ones wilt and decay, so righteous men rejoice in the Lord, and wicked men tremble; but God remains unchanged in goodness and truth.

When the great New Testament Preacher of repentance was asked by the multitude what they should do, he said, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none." When asked by the publicans he said, "Extort no more than that which is appointed to you." When asked by the soldiers, he said, "Do violence to no man, neither exact anything wrongfully; and be content with your wages." The doing of such things is true repentance; and when nations so repent, God also will turn from His fierce anger and repent of the evil which He said He would do.

Nineveh's escape from impending calamity is no exception to the law that suffering follows sin. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, which He said He would do unto them; and He did it not." Because they turned from their evil way, He did it not. Had they not turned, He would have done it. It is spoken of as His doing because all laws are expressions of His will and everything comes to pass according to His word. God does not personally do things with His hands like a man. His laws are not so bungling as that. They execute themselves.

Jonah came from God to warn the Ninevites that forty days more of such living would bring them to destruction. They believed God, turned from their evil way, and escaped destruction. They retreated from the fire and were not burned. As a physician says to his patient who loves high living, "If you continue to indulge as you are now doing, in forty days you will be a dead man," so God said to the Ninevites, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." A city threatened with famine, or pestilence, or invasion, might be similarly warned. God's judgments, that is, God's declarations concerning righteous and unrighteous living, are abroad in the earth. They are declared to us by prophets and righteous men; by all observers who see clearly, and think truly, and speak honestly the things that belong to a nation's prosperity and peace.

Two lessons may be learned from this passage. First, God is always personally close to man. Men have failed to find God not because He is so far but because He is so near. They have ascended up into Heaven and gone down into hell, but they have not looked earnestly into what is common and daily. A revelation that is not with signs and wonders is considered no revelation at all. Cities are overwhelmed before our eyes or a plague affects the whole land, and we say it is natural law. We have not learned that "Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off." It is God's hand that is upon us.

And, second, natural laws are but modes of Divine action. No doubt we live under a reign of law, but we need not on that account accept the carpenter theory of creation, which Carlyle treated with such noble scorn, and believe that God made the universe like a clock, wound it up and left it to tick by itself, till it runs down, concerning Himself no more with it. God is in all His laws. At last God and law are one. "All's law and all's love."

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

BY VERY REV. W. R. FREMANTLE, D.D.

"And the elders of the Jews builded," etc.—Ezra vi. 14.

In reading these words the question very naturally arises as to what part the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah took in the secular and material work of building the Temple.

The previous verses record how Darius caused a search to be made in the house of the rolls at Babylon for the decree of Cyrus, which had been in abeyance for about twenty years through the opposition made to the re-building of the Temple by the adversaries of the Jews. The roll was discovered, and Darius at once confirmed and renewed all his provisions, commanding that without delay materials for the fabric, money for the payment of the workmen, and all that was required for the restoration of the service of the sanctuary, and the maintenance of the priests, should be supplied

by the governors of the district at the king's cost, in order that they might offer sacrifices of sweet savour unto the God of Heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

We are to note in this the fact that the imperial power was responsible for the whole of the expense, and the imperial authority ordained by very severe penalties "the work to be done with all speed." What more was wanted?

We read in the verse preceding the text that prompt obedience was paid to the decree. The governor on this side the river, and his companions, did speedily according to all that which Darius had sent. "And the elders of the Jews builded." They had the royal authority to encourage them, they were protected from their enemies, and money for the payment of the labourers was provided, and yet the inspired historian adds, "they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the Prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." What is the inference we are to draw from this?

A great work is to be done for the national re-establishment of the worship of Almighty God. All that patronage, wealth, and power could do, was provided, but one thing was lacking, it was the spiritual element. The spiritual must co-operate with the secular, in order that success may attend the work. The governors and officers of the State might supply men, money, and materials, but until the religious feeling to obey the commandment of God, as well as the commandment of the king, was excited, the workmen would have no heart in the building. The blessing of the Lord prospered their handiwork.

This reference to the influence excited by the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah marks very plainly the nature and object of the prophetic office. The word which God in time past spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets was no empty sound or mystical foretelling of future events, the interpretation of which was to be found when the events were fulfilled; it was then what it is now, the voice of God to His Church stirring up zeal, and love and faith, and obedience to every good word and work. It was the fresh spring of moral and religious life to the nation. And this is just what we shall find to have been the effect of the prophecies which have been selected for our consideration this evening.

For if we read and compare their writings with those of an earlier date, we shall not trace in these latter Prophets of the old dispensation any evidence that the spirit of prophecy had degenerated from the time of Joel and Isaiah, or that the divine gift was gradually dying out; on the contrary, as the time drew near when a large portion of prophecy was to be accomplished, the predictions became, if possible, more plain, literal, and precise.

Take for example the last chapters of Malachi, which close with an unmistakeable prediction of St. John the Baptist, the messenger to prepare the way, and of Christ the Messenger of the covenant, to perfect the work of salvation.

In order, therefore, to mark the perfect harmony and identity and completeness of the Divine inspiration, the four Evangelists commence their history with the event to which this prophecy refers. The last Prophet of the Old Testament predicts the coming of the first Prophet of the New. St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, in the first chapter, and St. Matthew in the third, refer to this. "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God; as it is written in the Prophets, Behold I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee." The indenture fits the original document, and proves that the Old Testament is not contrary to the New. "Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises." The preaching of Haggai and of Zechariah in the time of Zerubbabel, and of Malachi in the time of Nehemiah, was as much the voice of God to the Church then as the preaching of John the Baptist was at the coming of Christ, or of the Apostles after the Day of Pentecost. And this will be more plain, if we refer to a few details of the prophecies, in the order in which they are placed in Holy Scripture.

And, first, we find Haggai, in the second year of Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, reproving the indolence and selfishness of the people who said, "The time is not come that the Lord's house should be built," and who were furnishing and inhabiting their ceiled houses while the house of God lay waste. The appeal was not made in vain; we read in ver. 12, chap i., "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and

Joshua the son of Jozedech the high-priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the Prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord." In three and twenty days after the preaching of that sermon they commenced the work; there was a blessing upon it; the Divine power was conveyed by the appeal to the congregation of Israel; there was an influence from above which did not exist before. We read, "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, and the spirit of Joshua, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of Hosts their God." Feeble, then, was the commencement; the decree came from Darius, the will and the zeal to execute it from the God of Heaven.

A month passed away, the work prospered, but the spirit of the people began to flag. As the building rose from the old ruins, they who saw the house in her first glory were moved to tears. It was, in their eyes in comparison of it as nothing, and in their grief their hearts began to fail, their hands grew feeble, the work had well-nigh ceased. The Prophet is sent to encourage them. He tells them that although the outward appearance of their building might not equal that of former days, yet it should not be inferior in the Divine favour, for the Lord had purposed to fill it with glory. "For the silver and the gold is Mine," saith the Lord of Hosts. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former," saith the Lord of Hosts. Again, the Divine Word raises their minds from the visible to the invisible, from the natural to the supernatural, "And the builders prospered through the prophesying of the Prophet Haggai."

And next in chronological order we find the Prophet Zechariah commencing his prophecy one month later than his predecessor. He had witnessed the laying of the foundations, and the zeal of the people, but as the work approached completion, his mission was to prepare the worshippers for the Temple, or rather to promote the building of the spiritual temple, to bring about a moral reformation, a religious revival among the people. In seven visions made to him on the night of the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month the typical character and spiritual meaning of the Divine purpose towards the restored nation was revealed to him. Thus in good words, and comfortable words, he expounds the parable of the overthrow of the empires; the establishment of the worship of the true God; the sacredness of the office of the two anointed ones—the prince and the priest, who conjointly prefigured the Branch Which should grow out of His place, Who should build the Temple of the Lord, Who should bear the glory, and should sit upon His Throne, and be a priest upon His Throne. With such Heavensent teaching Zechariah put a real and spiritual significance upon the daily labour of the builders, and taught them that they were not labouring for time, but for eternity, and that their labour would not be in vain.

At the end of two years, when it seems the ordinances and discipline of the Temple worship had been resumed, certain Jews came to enquire whether the fasts of the fifth month in remembrance of the capture and desolation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, which had been observed during the captivity, should be still observed. Zechariah is commissioned to tell the people that their mourning was turned into joy. The fasts of their exile were to be exchanged for cheerful feasts of joy and gladness. That what the Lord required was holiness of life. "Speak ye every man truth with his neighbour." "Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates." "Thus saith the Lord, I am returned into Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the holy mountain." Zechariah nowhere encourages the pride of the nation with promises of worldly greatness: his object is to produce faith and holiness. When, therefore, he predicts the final glory of the kingdom, he preaches first the advent of Christ in humiliation; and, with a distinctness which no Jewish controversialist has ever been able to gainsay, describes the King Who is God's fellow coming to the daughter of Jerusalem, "just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Then he describes the value put upon Him by the nation; "the goodly price that He was prized at," and the potter's field which was purchased with the thirty pieces of silver. Then in wonderful words the manner of His death is set forth: "They shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced." How the sword is awakened, how the Shepherd is smitten, the blood is shed, but "a bone of Him is not broken." Thus the "fountain was opened for sin and uncleanness," and the spirit of grace and supplications promised, trials and judgments shall prepare for the great and terrible day, when His feet shall

again stand upon the Mount of Olives, and the Lord shall be King over all the earth.

With such evangelical teaching did the Prophet prepare the people for the dedication of the Temple, and the reformation which for a few years was brought about by Ezra and Nehemiah. By his visions, by precept, and by prophecies, the Gospel of the grace of God was preached to the builders, "and they prospered through the prophesying of Zechariah the son of Iddo."

But, further—my text speaks of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, who began to reign about fifty years after the Temple was finished. What, then, is his connexion with the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah? The Book of Nehemiah supplies us with information which shews what must have been the moral state of the Jews during that period. For it seems that after the building and ordinances of the sanctuary had been restored, the religious excitement which had been awakened lasted but a short time, the people relapsed into a state of apathy. It is probable that the successor to Darius did not take the same interest in the welfare of the Jews, nor value the prayers of the Temple worshippers as his father had before him, and the voice of the Prophets may have been silent; whatever may have been the cause, there is evident proof of religious declension. Mixed marriages with the border-nations, neglect of the Sabbath, oppression of the poor, and corruption both of doctrine and practice, and the seeds of those doctrines which were shortly to be developed in the rival sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees, were among the evils which marked the period when the Lord stirred up the spirit of Nehemiah to visit the city, and undertake the work of re-building its walls.

Nehemiah commenced his work in the second year of the reign of Artaxerxes, and having completed it, returned to Persia; then twelve years afterwards he returned to Jerusalem to reform the vices which had been fostered by a corrupt priesthood, and practised by a corrupted people. Notwithstanding all his zeal, authority, and pious example,—notwithstanding his courage, and self-denial, and unbending firmness in the cause of truth,—the civil governor failed to influence the people. He needed the higher influence of the Prophets—the Ezra, the Zechariah, and the Malachi—to convince the disobedient of their error, and to encourage the good in holiness. As this was specially the mission of Malachi, he was the preacher to a back-sliding people. It is highly probable that Malachi began to prophesy about the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, when the Jews had been as long in possession of their religious ordinances, as they had been deprived of them during the captivity: seventy years of bondage had humbled them, seventy years of prosperity had puffed them up.

It must have been a melancholy and humiliating spectacle to the good Nehemiah, when he returned to Jerusalem the second time, to find Tobijah the Ammonite occupying an apartment in the holy Temple, the Levites deserting the house of God for the cultivation of their fields, and the tithe of oil and corn and wine not brought into the treasuries. It needed a sterner and more authoritative voice than that of the civil governor to awaken an unfaithful priesthood. The gentle and encouraging appeals of Zechariah were not suited to this state of things, the Prophet's harp must strike a harsher chord; and thus we find Malachi by the word of the Lord rebuking the sins of the nation, as Elijah had done before, and as John the Baptist did after him. What civil governor would have ventured to utter such a denunciation as this to the ordained priests of the Temple: "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory to My Name, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it." Who but an inspired Prophet could have warned the Levites that because they had offered polluted bread upon the altar, and the sick and blind and lame for sacrifice, the Lord would make His Name great among the Gentiles? Who but one commissioned from above would answer the self-excusing question, "Will a man rob God?" with such a sweeping reply as this, "Ye have robbed Me in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: even this whole nation." Who but one speaking in the power of the Holy Ghost could expose the unbelief and hypocrisy of the nation which professed to delight in the Messenger of the covenant, and yet would not abide the day of His coming? Who in His first advent would be like "a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap," in His second advent as a "burning oven." Such was the closing testimony of the Prophets to the Jewish nation. The last word of Malachi threatens with a curse, the first word of the Gospel is blessing.

Cyrus

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"Thus saith the Lord . . . to Cyrus," etc.—Isaiah xlv. 1—4.

In reviewing this world's history, we observe along its line a number of critical points, like a series of lakes along the course of a river in a hilly country. They are formed by the accumulation of causes, and the overflow compels a discharge in a stream of consequences of fresh character. At first there is, as it were, a great turmoil of the agitated waters just let loose; but, by due degrees, the stream runs calm and uniform again, the great difference from its former course being, that now it is broader, deeper, and stronger, and exhibits a marked contrast to the slowness and smoothness which preceded the accumulation. We recognize such points, either by great discoveries, as that of the compass, and of the new continent, or inventions, as those of gunpowder, printing, and the steam-engine; or by great events, as the conquest of Persia by Alexander, the completion of the Roman empire by Augustus, its fall in the west, the rise of the Mahomedan power, the conquest and colonization of America, the French Revolution: and great events call forth great men to conduct them, such as Alexander, Augustus, Mahomet, Charlemagne. Every eye which contemplates these events and characters, is immediately referred to a multitude of concurrent causes, which had been long severally working, until they found their way into one channel, and then overflowed and burst forth in combined operation.

To this list must be added the name of Cyrus, if it were only that one of his acts has become a cardinal date in chronology. He is, however, remarkable on other accounts. Not only because he effected a vital change in the history of the world, by uniting, through his conquests, the Eastern and Western Asia, which union has been transmitted through successive empires until this day, and by thus opening the communication of Asia with Europe; but also because he holds as eminent a place in sacred as in profane history, his reign forming a grand term, and conspicuous turning-point in the one, no less than in the other. In the one he is the restorer of the captive people of God to their country, and destroyer of their enemies; in the other, he is the raiser of one of the four empires on the ruins of another. In this respect he stands quite singular. There is found much difficulty in the work of identifying all his predecessors, whether they be Assyrian or Babylonian sovereigns, who are mentioned in Scripture, with members of the lists of the same as they are mentioned in profane history; and in both one and the other, we know little for certainty, if, indeed, always that, but their names, and as to his successors, there is nearly the same obscurity, unless we except Darius, of whom Scripture relates no extraordinary action. So does the light of heavenly truth fall down upon this chosen servant of God, and distinguish him in bright solidity from the dim and shadowy figures which move with crowns on their heads in the historic procession before and behind him! So does the calling of God, in every station, make man a new creature, distinct from all his ancient fellows, as His work, and the end for which He works, is distinct! They are fleeting: He alone abides.

Coming before us simply as a scriptural character, Cyrus will be stripped of much of the romantic interest which surrounds him in the pages of the Greek writers. We shall not have to hang over the tales of his boyhood, and admire the acts of his private life, as detailed in the beautiful romance of Xenophon; nor to gaze on the brilliant exploits of his manhood, as displayed in the lively pages of Herodotus. But the loss of all these traits of his heathen character, is more than counterbalanced by the exceeding interest which attaches to his position, as he stands in relation to the chosen people of God. Our very first meeting with his name is mysterious, and deeply impressive to a mind which looks with reverent and thankful eye upon the eventful record of God's Church. We begin with him, not in his youth, nor in his infancy, but actually before his birth, according to the declaration of the counsel of God, "Who calleth those things which be not, as if they were," and in the decree of the Most High, which He published through His Prophet Isaiah, when He was comforting His people against their impending visitation. More than a century before he came into

the world, he was announced by name, as a deliverer to the suffering Church of God. Nor was the name by which he was called, insignificant as to the splendid fortunes to which he was destined, both in the kingdom of this world, and in the Kingdom of God: it means, the sun. To the heathen, who laid such stress on the omens of names, and to the Persians in particular, to whom the sun was the grand representative of the King of all, such a name was full of bright assurance. While, to the people of God, who were lying in the cold of their extinguished sacrifice, and in the darkness of their captivity, it conveyed in one short word, the promise of a restored temple, and regained country. and to us, who see the full accomplishment of the promise, how full of meaning is the name, when, in profane history, we see him standing alone, the brilliant central body, around which, all the events and characters of the age revolve; and in sacred history, behold him still in the same position, but amid brighter satellites, and referring us immediately to the Father of lights, Who set him there, and putting into our mouths the song, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handy-work."

Not but that, when we come from this inspired passage, we are the more struck than ever, with the deep interest which the appearance of such a character excited in the heathen world, at such a crisis of its fortunes. Extraordinary tales concerning the birth and infancy of men, even forged, as they so frequently are, have weight, at all events, as proofs of the strong sensation which those men have produced in the public mind. Visions, therefore, are brought before us by the historian, as testifying to the future greatness of Cyrus, and as influencing his future life, by the very pains which were taken to counteract their fulfilment. Oracles open their lips to mutter concerning him; and the Delphic prophetess twice uttered her ambiguous voice, and perplexed the enemies of his greatness. In this respect, Cyrus foreshadowed part of the glory of the Redeemer of the true and spiritual Israel, Who alone, besides him, received this double testimony. But, in this latter case, the sibyls spoke not from their own instigation, but borrowed from the Jewish Prophets, whose predictions were made familiar to the heathen mind, in Lesser Asia, by the avowed and earnest expectations of the great Jewish dispersion throughout that region; and the conquest which Cyrus made of that region, was a step preparatory to its nestling the scattered fragments which never returned to the body of that people which he restored; and thus, both partially and wholly, indirectly and directly, Cyrus contributed to the settlement of God's people, and prepared the way for the preaching of Christ, and eternal restoration of all the children of God. Thus, all his exploits, as detailed by the heathen historians, are found to be consequent to the one grand exploit to which God called him; and, as we sit down to the spectacle which they exhibit, he reminds us of one of those characters on the stage, which continually refer us to some grand act of theirs behind the scenes. Or, to compare small things with great, of an Angel sitting down to eat and drink with man, before he delivers his message from God.

Passing from this calling before his birth, we meet him for the next time in Scripture, as already in full equipment for God's service. He comes before us in the full vigour of life, being now about forty years old, and in the plenitude of worldly power, having advanced from the conquest of Western Asia, and capture of its Lydian sovereign, to the taking of Babylon, and possession of its empire, and having thus established himself in supreme power over all the nations contained in that immense and fertile tract, which stretches from the Hellespont to the Indus. A more giddy height was never attained by human ambition. All the civilized, and almost all the known world, not to say almost all that was then worth knowing, lay prostrate at his feet, Greece only excepted; and she, however internally equal in value and weight to all the rest put together, was externally and politically, at present, too insignificant to attract a single glance from the predecessor of those monarchs whose eyes were steadily and fearfully fixed upon her, until she trod upon their necks. Egypt also, the very heart of the civilization of the times, must be excepted; but his eye was upon her, though it was a successor's hand that smote her. What a gathering indeed do we thus behold, of the materials of the power which God was building up for the deliverance of His people!

Never was a fitter representative, and capital of such an empire than Babylon. Its exceeding magnificence as a city, its immense strength as a fortress, its commanding position as a seat of government, gave a hold of certainty, and grasp of real occupation to him who sate upon its throne, and thence contemplated its dependencies. Bred up

amid the rudeness of mountain fastnesses, Cyrus must have been, notwithstanding the preparatory splendid spectacles of Sardis and Ecbatana, struck with utter amazement at the sight of this queen of Eastern Asia. Could we have wondered, if his heart had been lifted up with the overweening pride, which so signally distinguished his successors? but in nothing does human pride disclose its folly more palpably, than in being the quality, not of the meritorious acquirers, but of the unworthy inheritors of greatness. In his modesty, therefore, perhaps Cyrus did not far excel some other conquerors, who have shared with him the advantage of a hardy education in the school of submission, if not of adversity: and yet, we cannot but admire his generous treatment of Astyages and of Croesus, and throughout his history there is manifest a simplicity of affection, and soundness of judgment, which separate him far from the common herd of oriental despots, and a mind altogether adverse to the impiety of his predecessors and successors on that throne who made themselves gods upon earth. We have sufficient indications in all that we can reasonably make out in his character, that he was one of those whom God, according to the rules of His providence, could call as conscious instruments to His service; such a call He never gives to men who have abused such light as they have received. He may, and often does, make them unconscious instruments, as in the case of the Alexander who supplanted the Persian empire of Cyrus, which had done its work, by the Grecian, which was also to do its work, and then give place to the Roman, which was the sharpest and hardest, and yet the blindest and most unwitting, of all the tools which God has ever chosen from among mankind. But never did God change the Ethiopian's skin to white, in giving wicked men a heart to understand the blessed purpose to which He was directing their operations. In this respect, the testimony of Xenophon is valuable. Surely, he never would have put forth his exquisite view of moral training under the character of Cyrus, unless it had been still redolent, in his day, of virtuous excellence.

Thus God was preparing Cyrus for his public charge, much in the same way as He prepared Cornelius for his call. He brought him up to it from his very cradle; and we see His nursing hand wonderfully interfering to cast his education, as He had his birth, in the school which was most suitable for fostering the heart which He had given him, and producing a hardy and enterprising spirit, together with a sincere and generous disposition; and, above all, he was brought up in the purest religion that heathenism could afford, in one which abhorred idolatry, and presented the one true and living God to the worshipper, however it might induce the vulgar to pay an undue reverence to the sun and heavenly host as His symbols. Thus accomplished, Cyrus met the people of God in Babylon, and found the service to which God had destined him. He had, indeed, there received the whole of his enlistment-money, and it was time to take up the part of God's soldier. The full depth of the meaning of the promises made to him, through the Prophet Isaiah, had been exhausted; the deep of the great river Euphrates had been made dry under his feet, and given him a passage into a city otherwise impregnable, and an entrance through its gates of brass; kings had been weak before him, and opened to his victorious army the gates of their capitals, and been compelled to bring forth out of their deep cells and hidden chambers the accumulated wealth of ages; the proverbial treasures of the Lydian kings were drawn out of their secret darkness, and put into his hand, and the inestimable riches of Babylon filled up the measure of his extraordinary spoils of victory. Was he not, indeed, in the pay of the Lord, was he not bound to perform His service?

And God graciously informed him of his high commission. We are not, indeed, told how: but the ear of Cyrus had been long open; his exceeding prosperity had not diminished his reverence for God, as it does in so many men, whom it tempts to cry out, "My right hand and my arm hath gotten me the victory." In him we see God not only directing the hand, but also stirring up the heart. And if the direction of God gave him success, that success made him seek the more the direction of God. So uniform did it thus become, that the heathen wondered at him, as a prime favourite of Heaven; yet this was only the continuance of that favour which looked upon him from on high at the very outset of life. Even then, before he had particularly distinguished himself, there was observed in him that charm of invariable success, that full inspiration of confidence in his own good fortune into the minds of others, which seem to mark the favourites of God, and to denote a commission from Heaven, and by which they attach followers to them of such a character, and in such numbers as, according to the extent of worldly agency, secure success "O son of Cambyases, thee I address, for the gods

look to thee," were the words addressed to him by Harpagus, minister of his grandfather, while he was yet a youth. And the Greek historian tells us, that such was his success, that whithersoever he directed his arms, there it was impossible for a nation to escape. When, therefore, the capture of Babylon had put the crown to his good fortune, the heart of Cyrus must have felt that God had given him some especial work to do, and it was readily inclined to listen to the voice of one of His messengers. These met him on his arrival in that city; and if God did not inform him by direct inspiration, or through a Prophet, such as Daniel, who was now in Babylon, he found there a peculiar people in great numbers, and some of high quality, others of useful arts, and not only his observation, but his heart too, was drawn towards them. They were captives, smarting under the oppression of his enemies, and, therefore, he naturally regarded them as friends; they were also filled with abhorrence of the idolatrous worship of the Babylonians. And in this, again, they engaged the full sympathy of the king of a nation which pulled down the idols of nations throughout their conquests, as Greece had afterwards occasion to complain. Some of these people, as Daniel, would come into close and immediate communication with him, as being in places of high trust in the government which he found established there; and the regard which the Jews attracted from him would be returned with a warmth and sympathy which would still further attract his attention; for in him they saw the accomplishment of the prophecy of Isaiah; in him, even to his very name, they beheld the deliverer from captivity which it promised. There can be no doubt but that, when the communication between Cyrus and them had become sufficiently open, this prophecy was laid before him, and that his heart, already prepared, as we have seen, was opened to this word of God, and his spirit stirred up to fulfil the commission which it gave him.

And in the moment that he took this work in hand, in how different a view did he regard all that he had hitherto done! It was but the scaffolding to the rebuilt temple of the Most High; it was but the preparation of the way of God's restored people. Vast as it seemed in the eyes of the world, it was but the beginning of God's direct and visible operation. How different, indeed, will the same object appear to the eyes of the children of this world, and to those of the children of the world to come! To the former, as, for example, to Herodotus, the conquest of Babylon seems the bright crown of the acts of Cyrus, the accomplished purpose of his life, the solid ground of his great fame; but to the latter, as, for example, to Daniel or Ezra, the rebuilding of the Lord's temple, and restoration of God's people, appeared to be the grand object, and to give him his exalted position, set, far above all earthly thrones, among the thrones of the nursing fathers of the Church of God. In such a mind, Cyrus, acknowledging himself as the servant of the Most High, and as acting in His name, sent forth his edict for the rebuilding of the house of the Lord, and for the return of His people.

What an example, indeed, does Cyrus exhibit in this decree, what a bright light is he for the direction of all kings! At the loftiest pinnacle of human greatness, where men generally forget God amid the things which attend upon it, as the man upon the mountain's peak loses sight of Heaven, because of the clouds around him, Cyrus remembered God, saw Him at His height of Heaven, and bowed himself humbly before Him, and laid all his pride and treasure in the consciousness of being a servant of the Most High, of being charged with a commission from Him. How expressive of this spirit are the words of his decree! "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia," etc. (Ezra i. 2, 3.)

There is a heartiness of expression in this document which proves how deeply Cyrus felt his charge, and confessed the power which had exalted him. It may indeed be said, that there is nothing uncommon here, excepting the case of the publisher being a heathen, and that it is in the usual style of Christian princes, who always proclaim themselves to be such by the grace of God. It were well then if to the style, they more frequently added the spirit, and did not adopt the expression less in humility than in pride, more in defence of their power against all claim of man's election, than in deference to God's appointment. For even at the very best, they propose themselves as God's servants to subjects who adore that God, and they exalt their office, however they may abase themselves before Him. It is even exalted in the eyes of those to whom they should most look for regard, the wise and good, in exact proportion to that abasement. But Cyrus proclaimed himself charged as a servant, with an order from the peculiar God of an unfortunate and despised people, who were without a country, from the God Whose temple had been destroyed by the nation of the kingdom throughout which he made proclamation, and which temple, lying at that moment in ruins, seemed loudly to pro-

claim the weakness of its presiding deity, and to whom more loudly than to the idolatrous Babylonians, who could not but be of the spirit which cried out in Rabshakeh, "Who are they, among all the gods of the countries that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" and which prompted Belshazzar and his courtiers to drink wine out of the sacred vessels of the temple, with praise in their mouths to their own gods of wood, and stone, and metal.

But the real spirit which inspired Cyrus, is most distinctly seen when we come to compare the style of this decree, with that of the decree of one of his successors, Artaxerxes. Let us remark in this letter the following expressions:—"Artaxerxes unto Ezra, a scribe of the God of Heaven . . . and thy God . . . God of Israel . . . their God . . . your God . . . God of Jerusalem . . . whatever is commanded by the God of Heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of Heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" Where is the acknowledgment of service here, where is the confession of high charge? There is manifestly betrayed the spirit of the fear of the wrath of the God of Heaven, lest He should visit for the work being left undone, but not of the love of Him, that His work may be done, and that work, too, not of his own suggestion, but solemnly bequeathed to him by Cyrus. It is, in short, the decree which would come forth from those who styled themselves kings of kings, but not from him who confessed himself to be the servant of God.

But Cyrus further manifested the spirit which he was of, by seconding his words by deeds, and thus giving a good earnest fulfilment of his promise. He brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, through his treasurer, and put them into the hands of Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah; they were many in number, and of great price. God had therefore, indeed, opened the heart of His servant, and enlarged it far beyond the narrow room of the worldling's feelings, with whom more riches have but the effect of making him more greedy for gathering in, and more niggardly in spending forth. What a contrast does Cyrus exhibit to those proverbial hoarders, Midas and Cræsus, whose treasures after all, failing themselves or their children, fell to him, and established the saying of David, "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." Having with this restoration of its furniture, given the earnest of the restoration of the temple, he saw the children of God depart for the land of their fathers. Thus the prophecy concerning him was closed, and his mission was ended.

Henceforward he ceases to be an object to the eyes which are turned upon the Church of God, though God gave him a prosperous reign for thirty years afterwards. Parting with him in such a spirit, we feel a natural reluctance to receive the account of Herodotus, who relates that he was slain in an expedition against the Massagetæ, whose queen Tomyris insulted his corpse, and filling a skin with blood, put his head into it, saying that she would give him enough of blood. Our inclination, if not our conviction, is towards the account of Xenophon, according to whom, he dies peaceably in his bed, after having exhorted and comforted his sons with a touching and beautiful discourse, on the immortality of the soul. This, of course, is the composition of the writer; still it implies, as it accompanies, a very different conclusion of the life of such a man, of whom the former historian says, that "none of the Persians ever thought of comparing themselves with him." At all events, it is agreeable to part with such a character in the frame of mind to which we are disposed by the narrative of the latter.

Ezra

BY REV. R. W. EVANS, B.D.

"This Ezra went up from Babylon;" etc.—Ezra vii. 6.

Considered in an historical view, the Old Testament conveys the revelation of God's secret working in the moral world. The veil is taken off from the engines of His awful energy. Hence every act narrated is the embodied expression of the whole class of the acts of God's providence to the end of the world, just as in a book of natural history, is given the pictured individual animal to illustrate, and represent all the undelineated members of its class. Among these illustrative events, however, is one, which at first sight, seems contrary to what has ever been held to be an universal rule, namely, that

no nation, having run its career of progress and decline, and fallen at last through its viciousness, has ever risen, or will ever rise again. But the facts, when looked into, only prove the certainty of the rule. The re-establishment of the Jewish nation was through the special interference of God, and the impossibility of a nation being renewed to repentance, so universally true, was in this particular instance annulled by God. The Jewish nation started afresh with all the innocence and vigour of an infant state. The single-minded obedience of the days of Abraham was renewed, and after his example, princes, and priests, and people quitted with joy the ease, the comfort, the connections, the civilization of the land of their birth, and exchanged it for the peril, the unsettledness, the barbarism of the land of their fathers. After a vexatious delay of twenty years, the Temple at last was completely rebuilt and dedicated, and the labours of the prince Zerubbabel, the high-priest Jeshua, and the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who were unwearied in stimulating the work, were finally rewarded. But although the main object (which was no less than the visible re-establishment of the Church of God) had been happily accomplished, very much still remained to be done. The laws had to be re-established, the people to be instructed, the priests to be arranged in regular courses of duty. This part was reserved for Ezra, to whom his grateful countrymen assign the honour of a second founder, and put down next to Moses in the list of the upholders of their polity.

Ezra was of a sacerdotal family, and of the house of Aaron. Among his nearer ancestors he numbered the high-priest Hilkiah, who restored the lost Word of God in the reign of Josiah, and Seraiah, also high-priest, who suffered martyrdom at the hands of the king of Babylon, when he burnt the Temple. Thus he had every incitement and generous motive which splendour of ancestry can bestow. He therefore gave himself up with all diligence to the study of that law which his forefathers had maintained with such zeal, and resistance even unto blood. He became a ready scribe in it, and was therefore properly entrusted by the Persian king, with the conduct of a second body of returning Jews, and commissioned to settle on a permanent footing the civil and religious constitution of the country. It was indeed time. Fifty-seven years had elapsed since the completion of the Temple. And yet the nation could scarcely be said to be restored. The powers granted to Ezra were very ample. He had authority to appoint magistrates, and judges, and the infliction of capital punishment, even to death. He took with him a great quantity of silver and gold, to which not only the captive Jews, but even the king and his councillors largely contributed, expressly offering to the God of Israel. He was furnished also with vessels for the service of the Temple, some of which, perhaps, had belonged to the former house, and were now on their return with the people. Having completed his preparations, he quitted Babylon in the beginning of Spring, and in about a week joined the caravan which he had appointed to assemble on the river Ahavah. Here he spent three whole days in reviewing the people. He found but two families of priests, and to his grief and dismay not one of the Levites. With much difficulty and entreaty he prevailed upon some families to accompany him. This unwillingness of the sacred tribe arose, no doubt, from the consideration, that they could have no portion in the land, but must depend upon tithes, the receipt of which could not but be precarious in an unsettled country. This obstacle was but imperfectly met by the king excusing the whole tribe of Levi from tribute. Here too he delivered into the custody of the priests all the silver and gold, and vessels for the Temple. He then proclaimed a fast, that they might humbly entreat their God for guidance and protection. What an inestimable treasure would have been an account of the reflections of Ezra on this occasion. He was a scholar of celebrity in the history, and laws, and religion of his country. And now he was on his way to the land of his fathers, to the spots which were painted in his imagination in glowing colours, and associated with most heart-stirring events. He was going to breathe the same air, to look on the same scenes, to drink from the same wells, and rivers, to have all the same outward impressions as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Samuel, and David, and Solomon; and Jerusalem, and Hebron, and Jordan, and Hermon, all the cities, and rivers, and mountains, sanctified by some work of God's mercy, rose to his mind. He was even proceeding to tread in the very track which Abraham had made when he first entered the land. But then he bethought him, that he should every where meet with ruins, and monuments of God's wrath executed upon his fathers. He would find their very tombs rifled. Yet from these mournful thoughts he could turn to themes of overpowering joy. He was going to restore the civil and religious polity of his country, and this was in

effect to restore the visibility of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. He was bringing back from captivity and abeyance the prophecies, the sacrifices, the people which were to announce, and to give the Redeemer to mankind. He was bringing all mankind out of spiritual captivity, he was carrying with him the regeneration of the world. The earthly Jerusalem was the end of his march, but the heavenly Jerusalem alone could terminate his pilgrimage. After a stay of three days, the assembled caravan began its march, and after a journey of four months arrived at Jerusalem, about Midsummer.

Deep and varied must have been the feelings of Ezra as he made his way through rubbish and ruins, which even his scholarship could scarcely identify, and gazed at last upon the temple, rising in solitary majesty above the fragments of palaces and walls, and towering over the ragged half-built town. How clearly had the abomination of desolation left the print of his foot-track! And even that house had lost its essential furniture, the in-dwelling of the cloud of glory. Yet not for ever. The voice of prophecy proclaimed that the glory should return, though his eyes should not see it. Meanwhile he rejoined brethren, friends, and countrymen, all engaged in the same holy work, and welcoming him and his company with all the gladness of a triumph. The first three days Ezra assigned to collecting and arranging the gifts and treasures which he had brought with him, and on the fourth he delivered them into the hands of the priests, and verified his commission to the lieutenants of the king, and then the whole company offered sacrifice in behalf of themselves and all their dispersed brethren. What a moment was this to a mind like Ezra's! It was the first time that he had offered sacrifice, and as he knew, if any one, the virtue of the rite, how must his soul have been overjoyed at regaining this inestimable and lofty privilege of the sons of God, this means of communication with His mercy, this embodied prophecy, which his eyes could see, and hands could handle, of redemption to life everlasting.

But his satisfaction was soon interrupted. The very nature indeed of his commission must have prepared him to find a very unsettled, and, as regarded the precepts of Moses, unlawful state of things. But he did not expect the extent to which their recklessness had gone. The chiefs came and informed him of a matter which went to the very vitals of the existence of the new state. Not only the common people, but they who should have known better, the priests and the Levites, had taken wives from the heathens, even from the tribes which were under God's especial curse, as the Hittites, the Amorites, and the rest of the Canaanites, and were mingling with them, and doing according to their abominations. Here was afflicting news indeed. Had there even been no law against such intermarriage, yet common discretion, the slightest thought given to God's will, the most superficial acquaintance with their own history, should have held them back. How could they look for pure servants of Jehovah in children born of the womb and nursed in the arms of worshippers of Baal? Was not their history full of the miserable effects of idolatry thus introduced into the nation? Had not Jezebel alone introduced it into two lines of kings, both of Israel and of Judah, and thence among the people, and thus brought on their former destruction? They were undoing with their own hands the very work to which God had appointed them, for which alone He had kept them together, and had brought them back. Would He not cast them off, and seek builders of His temple elsewhere? Inexpressible, therefore, was the grief of Ezra at this news. He rent (he says) his garment and his mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard, and sat down astonished. In this sorrow he was joined by all that trembled at the Word of God in Israel, amid whom he sat down in the silent stupor of grief until the evening sacrifice. At that hour, when it was customary for each worshipper to accompany the offering of incense with his prayers, Ezra poured out his heart before God in a most imploring and sorrowful prayer, confessing the thankless disobedience with which they had returned so great mercy. So strongly did this prayer and his tears affect the people, that there flocked to him a very great congregation of men, and women, and children. And the people wept very sore. This shows how much they had profited by adversity. The people, which before the chastisement of their captivity, had set at naught all God's statutes, and had persecuted, mocked, and stoned all His Prophets which rebuked them, were now broken in heart, and melted into tears at the upbraiding of Ezra. So heartily did they second him in this work of reformation, that a court of inquiry having been appointed to investigate the matter, in the course of three months the evil was entirely removed.

Thus the ground was cleared, and Ezra could now begin to re-erect the fabric of Church and State. But the unsettled condition of the Jews, especially at the capital,

seems to have very much hindered, if not stopped, his progress. It is true that men and not walls constitute a state, and laws, and institutions, are its moral and only lasting bulwarks. But personal security is requisite for their erection, and this Jerusalem had not. Her walls were still in ruins, her gates had been burnt with fire. Ezra had no commission to restore these. Under such disadvantages he laboured for thirteen years. At the end of that time the news of the sad state of his countrymen, how that the remnant left of the captivity in the province were in great affliction and reproach, and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates thereof burnt with fire, was brought to Nehemiah, a Jew of high rank, who was filling the honourable station of cup-bearer to the Persian king, Artaxerxes. He was so much affected with the melancholy account, that he sought and obtained leave to go himself to Jerusalem, commissioned with full powers to rebuild her walls. After much opposition from the jealousy of the neighbouring tribes, he effected this work. And now at length they were at leisure to set about the work of re-establishing their civil and religious institutions, and Ezra again forms the prominent figure of the day. The people met as one man in one of the streets of Jerusalem, and here Ezra mounted on a wooden pulpit, read to them in the law of Moses from morning until mid-day. The day was most appropriately chosen, being the first day of the seventh month. This was the commencement of their civil year, and was solemnized by the feast of trumpets, the stirring sound of which now ushered in the re-establishment of the law, as it had formerly its delivery. It was also the anniversary of the former settlement of their religion at Jerusalem by the dedication of Solomon's Temple. With such associations the people came together. As soon as Ezra opened the book, the vast and breathless multitude stood up, and on his blessing God, they all answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands, and bowing their heads, and worshipping with their faces to the ground. When they heard the words of the law they wept. They were overcome with the consciousness of having so long, and so grievously offended against them, with the thoughts of having been so long deprived of the Word of God, of the chief prerogative of their station as His people. So completely had God's chastisement changed the heart of this stiff-necked race. Their captivity was now ended, their temple restored, their wall rebuilt, and God's Word once again sounded in their ears. It was a blessed hour, it was that hour so precious both to nations and individuals, when, God having bruised and not broken, the sense of returning health and joy is quickened by the fresh memory of pain and sorrow. Then all the gates of the soul are lifted up, and the Word of the King of Glory enters in. The temple of the heart is filled with its brightness, and the thoughts are clothed with light as with a garment. But if they wept in the joy of the accepted penitent, so did they in sorrow for what they had lost. They had forgotten the very language of the law. How were they estranged from their God, and from their fathers! The Psalmist had spoken of the mercy shown to Israel when he came out of Egypt, and had heard a strange language. But now, alas! he was come into his own land, and heard a strange language. Yea, the language of his fathers, of their deeds, of their covenant, of their promises, of their laws, of their religion, was strange to him. He found himself an alien. He stood as one deaf, as a child incapable of speech, as one bereft of sense. It was necessary to interpret the law to him piecemeal. What an interval of painful rebuke and shame must have been that of the reading of each portion of the original. He was removed by a whole step from God, Whose message he could not understand until the turn of the interpreter came. He was as a foreigner receiving communication from a foreign prince. During this mournful interval many a pious gaze no doubt was directed to the temple, and the thought of how much was wanting there cut him with reproof to the heart. Restored he was, but not to his former place. He was at a greater distance than before. Some portion of God's confidence had been evidently withdrawn. No wonder then that the people wept. Still deeper cause had they for it than Josiah.

The day was a joyous holiday; yet noon came, and Israel was still weeping. It was probably the first time and the last, that, on this or any other holiday, a multitude was obliged to be bidden and prest by their spiritual guides to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves. Nehemiah, and Ezra, and the Levites that taught the people, said to them, "This day is holy unto the Lord your God. Mourn not, nor weep. Go your way: eat the fat, and drink the sweet . . . neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So their weeping was turned into joy. On the next day the reading was resumed, and then they discovered the precept for observing the feast of tabernacles, and that the days set apart for its celebration were close at hand. Never did this festival

touch them so nearly, since the days of Joshua. They were brought back very much to the situation of their fathers of that day. Like them they had just arrived in the land after a long captivity and weary journey. But instead of their former riot and revelry, they now listened every day of the feast to the reading of the law by Ezra. Now their hearts were no longer fat, and they felt its meaning. They were possessed with all the holy joy, with all the blissful peace of mind, with all the fervent thankfulness of the accepted penitent. Among such celebrators Ezra would be foremost. From his great piety, and from his intimate knowledge of the history of his fathers, he would feel the mercy most keenly.

To Ezra, and to this occasion has been assigned by unanimous Jewish and Christian tradition, the first collection and canon of all the books of Scripture. And to his patient teaching we must impute the generally prevailing knowledge of Scripture among the Jews after their captivity, so strongly contrasted with their ignorance before it, when a high-priest and a king were astonished at the contents of the book which they had rescued from a long oblivion. They were too well informed ever after to relapse into idolatry. Thus he prepared a highway for his God. Few teachers and expounders have been blessed with such visible fruits of their labours as was Ezra. As a preacher, he had the satisfaction of turning away the people for ever from their besetting and besotting crime of idolatry. As a scholar, he had rescued God's Word from all danger of the fate which had befallen it in the days of king Josiah. And may not all scholars of the Word of God, though they be not blessed with the same proof of the efficacy of their labours, work on in the same unshaken confidence, with the same ardent zeal, with the same cheerful hope? If the truth as it is in Christ be their object, verily not one iota of their labours shall lose its reward. He Who will not let a sparrow needlessly fall to the ground, will not assuredly suffer any of their precious hours to be consumed in vain. He will bless them, though the world bless them not, He will number them into the precious treasury of the time of His Church. How often has He surprised mankind with the unlooked for works of the nurslings of His truth and wisdom. From a closet retired from every worldly eye, from a student overlooked by all surrounding society, has more than once proceeded a volume which has waked as with a shout a slumbering world, and set on fire all the hearts of mankind. From a depth to which no worldly mind could go, He has drawn up waters of so sweet unwonted freshness, as has made the world wonder at the deliciousness of the draught.

Another work ascribed by unanimous tradition to Ezra, is the re-establishment of the courses of the services of the priests. To furnish a regular supply to the temple, David had divided the priests into twenty-four courses, which served each two weeks. So plentiful a supply left nothing wanting to the magnificence and high scale of splendour which attended every thing belonging to the temple. But this was shorn away together with the rest of its glories. Out of the twenty-four courses, four only returned from captivity. To keep up the same number, each of these was subdivided into six, and had the old names imposed on them. Hence in our Lord's time we hear of the course of Abiah, which was the eighth under David. Thus was a veil drawn over this nakedness of the ministry of the temple, and in a few generations it was only to the prying eye of the scholar that the inward deficiency was visible.

How, and where Ezra finished his laborious and useful life, Scripture does not say. That he should have returned to Babylon seems little accordant with his high-minded and godly patriotism. We may therefore, very reasonably adopt the account of Josephus, who tells us that he died at a very advanced age, and was buried with great pomp at Jerusalem. Thus ended the course of this faithful servant of God. Well were it if all priests belonged to his course, took him for their head and model, and served their little fortnight of existence in God's temple with the same diligence. He was, indeed, one of those bright and burning lights in the Church of God, to which posterity turns with reverence and thankfulness, for the blessed radiance of truth and comfort, which flows to them from it. The word of the Old Covenant, which we at this day hold in our hands, we mainly owe, under God, to his diligence and piety. So carefully did he provide for its maintenance and diffusion, so inculcate it into the hearts of the people, that in despite of attacks such as it had never experienced under the old temple, in despite of the bloody attempts of the Syrian kings to blot it out of the catalogue of books, it has never once come, nor been in danger of coming, into the jeopardy which befell it in the days of Josiah. Through him we have the Law and the Prophets bearing their testimony to our great spiritual head, and we see Moses and Elias attending upon

him. Let us study the example of this great benefactor. He left all for the Word of God, as did afterwards Andrew and Peter for Christ. He gave up all the comforts of life, a settled home, a civilized people, the leisure enjoyed under a regular government, for an unsettled life amid the revolting turbulence and distraction of a newly settled colony. Like his great predecessor Moses, he preferred suffering with the people of God, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Babylon. When we consider how the habits and cultivated mind of the scholar revolt from the turbulent vulgarity and ignorance of the multitude, how his thoughts are dispersed, his feelings wounded, his time broken up by most occupations which bring him among them, and when we take into the account the reluctance to practical detail produced by his speculative habits, we cannot but admire Ezra's piety, entire self-devotion, and complete surrender of all his desires, and all his gifts to the service of God. He was a scholar of the only true school, and therefore his masculine vigour of mind was never in danger of being broken by the effeminate dreaminess, by the moral ricketiness, which is so often the wages of ill-directed literary leisure. The truth of God was his sole aim, the Word of God was his study, and wherever these are, there is all the buxom health and freshness of mind. For there it is uncontracted and unnumbed by unnatural position, unfettered by narrow room, but stretches itself forth in all the graceful freedom of action to the whole extent of its excellent proportions. It is fresh with the life of the life-giving spirit, it is strong from the manly exercise of spiritual wrestling, it is pure from bathing in the wells of truth. Such is the learned priest of God, such is the Christian scholar, after the model of Ezra. And God be thanked that He hath granted many such shining examples to our Church, blessed be His holy name for the many and great benefits which we are at this moment, but too unwittingly, deriving from them. May it please Him to prolong the illustrious succession, to maintain His Word pure, and rightly understood among us. And may we, on looking towards them, count light after light, as lamps of the temple of the living God, and bow our heads in thankfulness to Him Who hath done so much to prepare us for His service, as a peculiar people.

Ezra

BY REV. CHARLES L. NOYES.

"The hand of the Lord our God is upon all them that seek Him," etc.—Ezra viii. 22.

Ezra is not an inspiring character, nor his work an attractive one. He can never stand on a level with a David or an Isaiah in our affection and reverence. Each day is he farther removed from our ideal of piety and faith. In belief and obedience he is a prosy literalist. His measures were sometimes harsh and offensive, nor is their perhaps necessary severity redeemed by any genial warmth of love and sympathy. Ezra, the scribe, he is called, and we hastily wonder if, in poring over musty manuscripts he had not become a short-sighted theorist, out of whose soul the currents of human feeling had been dried away.

But if this is all we have to say of Ezra, we show ourselves as narrow and intolerant as we think him to be. When we see the essential truth, purity, courage of his character, we confess that none is worthier of humble respect. When we estimate his service to religion and humanity, we wonder if it has ever been surpassed. He was the saviour of his people, and of their faith and ours. His coming made an epoch in the history of redemption. His work, unlike Christ's as it is, made Christianity possible. He, too, was a forerunner of Christ.

The Jew had returned from the captivity a mere remnant. He had indeed re-occupied the historic hill of Zion, and was re-building the waste places of Jerusalem, but it was impossible for him to recover his ancient condition as a people, with a distinct and exclusive national existence, for, first, the central section of the land, the home of patriarchal memories, the sacred heart of Shiloh, remained the seat of his bitterest foe, because most near akin,—the Samaritan, who had alloyed the purity of his blood and of his religion, and was for the true Israel the most insidious source of pollution. And north of these the land was overrun with heathen populations, who were to crowd down and make even the home of Messiah "Galilee of the *Gentiles*,"—almost a land that "sat in darkness." And already that movement of trade had begun which in later days

was to make all that northern country a caravan route of trafficking Gentiles, and to set about its borders east and west a girdle of mercantile cities swarming with people of mixed blood and mixed religions. So the poor remnant found themselves a ragged fragment in a corner of the old country. Then, as we know, their old dominion and their old constitution were never recovered. Such government as they won for themselves was of a different type from any that had gone before, a government by governors with licenses from the great king. How changed from all that was pre-supposed in the settlement that gave Israel the land of Canaan for an eternal inheritance! How difficult in such a situation to retain their national type or their religious integrity! Yet how important it was that they should hold together and stand apart! The sacred salt of revealed truth was deposited with them as a holy trust, and, under an impulse deeper than their instinct of self-preservation, the sense of their predestined mission, they felt that they must keep it from melting and diluting away into the ocean of heathenism enclosing them on every side. It was necessary for him and for the race that the Jew seal himself up in an impervious compartment. The confines of the holy land no longer made a safe enclosure, the walls of Jerusalem sooner or later must fall before invading armies, and were no barrier against the subtle encroachments of social contamination.

And yet we have recalled only a part of the difficulty; for this remnant of the return was not the largest or richest or the most important part of the holy race. Back in Babylon lived on a strong and powerful colony, proud of their blood, of their wealth, of their learning. And already the Jew, with his commercial genius, was planting himself in all the great centres of commerce. At Damascus, Alexandria, Ephesus, Tarsus, Corinth, and Rome, they grew to be sometimes nearly a third of the city. And their banking interests were already fast developing, and the gold of the nations was passing through their hands. Here was a people whose sacred mission in history was to be exclusive, solitary and apart. Now how was that to be done? All very well while they were huddled together, a compact little body of tribes within the four corners of the promised land. There by political or martial measures they might repel all foreign mixture, all foreign alliance, all alien influences. In this new era, when scattered and broken, and at last to be dispersed over the face of the wide earth from Babylon to Rome, forced into daily, hourly contact with the swarming millions of heathendom, engaged in the intricate complications of a huge commerce, shouldering Gentiles night and day in the streets, far from the holy places, with a thousand new, undreamed-of influences springing up on every side, what force was there that could hold them together and apart from the mass of paganism? How could they retain their national identity, their social separation, their religious exclusiveness?

This exclusiveness was the very meaning and reason of their national existence, for it was an element in the large plan of God. But now another element in His plan had begun to work with overwhelming power, a tendency to universalism. It was the day of universal empires. All the civilizing instincts of humanity had set themselves in the direction of a world-wide sway, which should break down all local barriers, all provincial despotisms, all national peculiarities. The interest of this world movement seemed to lie simply in discovering which empire should be world-wide. Assyria, Chaldea, Egypt, Greece, Rome—which was it to be? And, whichever it might be, this little people of Israel, which dared to think that it could and that it ought to stand outside the currents of universal life, lay in the very track of imperial advance. Was it Assyria moving west or Egypt moving north, or Greece or Rome hurling back the weight of Eastern pressure—all must cross Palestine. You see the tremendous problem set for Israel. She must fulfil the mission God had laid upon her, in the very teeth, it seemed, of the movements of God's larger purpose. The day of reconciliation would come, when the true seed of Israel would welcome universality, when the heaven which had been slowly rising in stillness and seclusion should pour its pure and potent energy through all the lump of humanity; when the seed which had grown to a tree in its safe enclosure should send out its roots unto all waters, and welcome to the shelter of its spreading branches all the fowls of Heaven. But the time was not yet ripe for that; still the heaven must purify and invigorate itself, still the tender plant must have time to grow, and how to find it room, and how to fence it off from the ravages of the wild boar of the wood, that was the question.

Was there ever anything in history so tragic as this destiny of Israel, so glorious as their achievement of it? Here they lay, this strange, unique little people, consecrated to separateness, and yet with this double obstacle, first, that their home was at the very

centre where the world's forces told against them most powerfully; and, secondly, dispersed away from their home, in the thick of those very cities which were the embodiment of this world movement—cities where all the nationalities mingled and mixed till they fused as metals in a crucible.

That was the situation Israel had to face, and the problem for her was this, How I am to keep the treasure of my peculiar truth and obedience and worship, in a world in which nothing can longer be kept apart in its distinctness and purity. And the answer was found in that law, marvellous in its intricate completeness and its adaptation to the one end to be held in view, which Ezra brought back with him in his hand. Obedience to this law, voluntarily undertaken, was the compartment in which the Jew sealed himself away from the invasion of the world without. Its purport and its purpose was to keep him from Gentile communications, from inter-relations with the heathen. It bent itself to effect this seclusion by a deliberate enforcement of peculiar customs, which should make every customary act of a Jew's life a sign of his unique and Divine prerogative. The stamp was set on his food, on his clothes, on every detail of his daily life—the stamp which marked him off from the unclean heathen world without. At every turn it met him, that he should never forget it. He was hedged around. Touch not, taste not, handle not, was the command which rang out in persistent warning against all that could socially blend the Jew with the Gentile. Knowing, too, the Jew's weak place and the strongest current he must stem, this law laid its restraining hand on his commercial passions, and set to work to make elaborate commerce impossible. It broke up intricate money relations by its system of jubiles, it cut short obligations of long debts, it abhorred usury and interest, and, finally, threw into the very thick of commercial transactions the bar of the Sabbath day. The Sabbath—the pledge of loyalty to the covenant—was to be kept as the recurrent and ever-renewed witness of God's peculiar relations to His people, holding them marked out and distinct in unmistakable isolation. The Sabbath—the test of the Jew's heroic adhesion to his God, summoning him week by week to cut across every tie that knit him to his Gentile fellows. Such in every aspect and operation and demand was the law—a call to the Jew to shake himself loose from every encumbering relationship, to retreat within the hidden seclusion which his God kept ever open for him, even as a hole in a rock, where he might be hidden under the covering of God's hand and hear Jehovah pass by and proclaim the name of the Lord. Such was the law. It had world-wide issues, promises and hopes, which should follow on what was now doing. But for the Jew its one insistent cry was: "Come out from among them: be separate; touch not the unclean thing; hold aloof in meat, in drink, in coming and going, in sleeping and waking, in the house, in the market, in marriage and in death, cut yourself off, be a peculiar people." Nothing could fuse the Jew and the Greek, nothing could destroy the identity of Israel so long as he sustained a continuous, unchanging social habit, so that every time he ate or drank he went apart and withdrew into the secret of his religion. No wonder, then, that meats and drinks, and keeping of sacred days, and washing of pots and kettles, became to him the very bulwark, and at last the centre and substance of his creed and piety. The law made the touch of heathen things pollution to him. But he was immersed in heathendom. He could not be sure that any vessel he was about to use had not just before been in heathen hands, given to some unclean purpose. And so in his very zeal for the law, he frittered it away at last in scruples about things that perish with the using. And so, in the end, the successors of Ezra and the great makers and transmitters of the law were the Pharisees, who, "when they come from the marketplace, except they wash themselves, they eat not: and many other things there be which they have received to hold, washing of cups, and pots, and brasen vessels." We see how, beginning with a noble motive, they carried their principle to this sad excess and absurdity; how, when the law became the end rather than the means, they soon forgot the law itself and made it void through their traditions; how, immersed in minute problems about mint, anise, and cummin, they let slip the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith. All this was far away from the time and the practice of Ezra, but the germs of it lay in his reformation, and some shadow of the mischief which it was to work already darkened his counsel and his procedure. To him the law was more sacred than human hearts and homes. He had yet to learn that man was not made for the law but the law for man. He was a man of his age and his situation. How terribly dark was his age and hard was his situation, that we have tried to see, and against that dark background, the struggle of Ezra and the men of the law to carry through their sacred trust is one

of the most noble and inspiring efforts among all the conflicts and sacrifices of the heroes of faith. One thing they did, and did most bravely: they retained, secured and transmitted that light of truth and hope of redemption which had been entrusted by God to Israel's keeping. They kept the channels clear and free down which the grace of God could arrive at future generations. Without their supreme effort that message had been dissipated into thin air, that river of hope would have been choked in the waste of sand. Through their struggles to hold fast the identity of Israel, the way of the Messiah was cast up and prepared; and we are to-day living in Christ through their tough and unconquerable persistence.

Nehemiah

BY REV. W. HARRIS.

"I was the king's cupbearer."—Nehemiah i. 11.

All we know of Nehemiah is what he tells us himself; and we gather from it that he was not a priest, but most likely belonged to the tribe of Judah, perhaps to the house of David. Like Daniel, he held high office in the court of the land of his captivity; but, unlike him, he was not a Prophet, nor did he have any special revelation or commission from God for the work to which he devoted himself. Animated simply by love to his God and his country, he undertook, and successfully completed, a very difficult task, manifesting throughout many noble qualities, and proving himself worthy to be counted a star of the first magnitude among the Old Testament saints. His zeal was not that of a blind rider, who knows not how to guide his steed, but was tempered with remarkable prudence, and his boldness in the path of right was coupled with wise moderation and patience. The question put to him by the King of Persia, and the question with which Nehemiah answered him, reveals,—

I. THAT A COMMON RELATIONSHIP IS INDISPENSABLE TO PRODUCE SYMPATHY.

It is said that if one string of a harp be struck with force, all the other strings will vibrate too. This is because they have a common relation to the framework of the instrument—a string unattached to *that* would not feel the blow. We all know that if one nerve of the body is suffering, all the nerves connected with it—oftentimes the whole net-work of the human frame—will feel more or less pain. But a nerve unconnected with that body would not feel it. And if a string of people connect themselves at the same time with an electric battery, each one, as the shock passes round, knows from his own experience how the other feels. So like circumstances create a sympathy in men. There were many men in the kingdom of Persia who held the same relation to Jerusalem as Nehemiah did; many, doubtless, who "wept when they remembered Zion," and who said with him, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." There were many who, when they heard that the walls of their beloved city were still broken down, and the gates thereof burned with fire, poured out their hearts to the God of Heaven in such words as: "Look down from Heaven," etc. (Isa. lxiii and lxiv.) None of these people would have asked Nehemiah, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?" But the Persian King had neither part nor lot in this matter; to him "the city of the Great King" was but a name, its ruined walls but a heap of dust. He lacked relationship to Zion, and therefore he lacked sympathy with Nehemiah, and failed to see why a man with the abundance of wealth and influence which belonged to his high position should be sad when he was "not sick."

II. A MAN WHO PREFERRED THE GOOD OF HIS NATION AND THE GLORY OF HIS GOD, TO PERSONAL AND PRIVATE EASE AND COMFORT.

To him the dust of the city of his fathers was dearer than all the gold of the Persian palace, the welfare of his brethren of far more importance than his own temporal prosperity. The germ of that self-sacrifice which is at the root of all true patriotism is developed in the family life. A good father and a devoted mother live and labour not so much for their own comfort and advancement, as for the children who depend upon them. Feeling that they are stronger in body and mind, and soul, they use all these advantages to bless and guide those who are in every respect weaker than themselves.

Now the patriot only extends this self-abnegation; instead of stopping at the family, he takes in the whole of his nation, feeling, probably, that he has gifts which are wanting in most of his fellow-countrymen, he gives himself to their welfare, and devotes wealth and position, and oftentimes life, to their advancement. Look at him who is, perhaps, the finest specimen of a patriot in our time, Garibaldi; after fighting for a lifetime for the freedom of his people, and refusing all external and personal reward, he gives his old age to devising plans to bring back to the city of Rome some of her ancient prosperity, and so make her doubly secure against any relapse into bondage. His fellow-countrymen lie upon his heart as his children, and he counts no labour a toil which will make their liberty more secure. Nehemiah was a patriot of this kind, and he was more. Jerusalem was not only the chief city of his nation, but it was the place of the temple of his God, the only spot in the wide world where stood a building dedicated to the worship of Jehovah, the only outward manifestation of the existence of a Church of the living God. He could say with the Psalmist, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee....Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good." In his sacrifice for others he was governed by the highest feeling that can animate a human soul, even by that which prompted the Divine Father to "spare not His own Son, but to deliver Him up for us all"; which led that Son to cry out, "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished"; which burned in the great Apostle's breast, when he wrote, "My heart's desire and prayer to Israel is, that they might be saved," and which caused the noble army of martyrs and confessors of our own land to love not their own lives unto death, but to purchase for us, at the stake and on the field, the liberties we now enjoy.

III. THE MEANS BY WHICH NEHEMIAH'S DESIRE WAS ACCOMPLISHED AND HIS COUNTER-ANCE CHANGED.

"So I prayed unto the God of Heaven." And we may judge that, like Hannah after a like act, he "went his way, and his countenance was no more sad" (1 Sam. i. 2). Power must come before motion; in a vessel that depends upon the wind, the sails must catch the gale before any progress can be made; and before the locomotive will carry us on our journey, there must be the fire to generate the steam. Before labour there must be strength, and before any work for God or man can be undertaken, with any hope of success, the help of the Spirit of God must be brought down by prayer. All God's great servants have recognised this, and have gone to work in the spirit of that beautiful prayer, "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings, with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy name." Before Daniel would venture to show Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation of his dream, he and his friends united "to desire mercies of the God of Heaven, concerning this secret" (Daniel ii. 18); and before the great Master-Builder of the Church elected its twelve foundation stones, it is written that He "continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke vi. 12).

Notice how Paul connects praying and doing in Philipians iv. 6-9. So in the case of Nehemiah; even between the king's question and his answer, he sent up a silent petition to Heaven, and he had still further prepared for this interview by days of fasting and prayer (chap. i. 4). The voice of prayer runs like a golden thread through all the record of his doings, and in due time Jehovah said, "Awake! awake! put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments O Jerusalem, the holy city" (Isa. lii.); and the wall was built, and the gates set up, and God made the inhabitants to "rejoice with great joy, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."

1. Sorrow and joy are revealers of human character. Know what makes a man's joy or sorrow, and you know the spirit of the man. The loss or gain of gold is that which most moves some; the patriot grieves most when he sees his country in distress, the godly man echoes the words the Psalmist: "Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law" (Psa. cxix. 136).

2. Prayer has a place, and therefore it must have a power, in the life of a godly man. To give anything a place implies that it has a power. Electricity and steam hold very prominent places in connection with the transaction of the business of this great city. Men could not do without them. But they hold those places because of the power they put forth to carry ourselves, our merchandise, or our thoughts, all round the world. God had given prayer a place in His Divine government. To the individual man, He says, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet" (Matt. vi. 6). The Apostolic Church was commanded to "wait for the promise of the Father," which they evidently under-

stood as a waiting "in prayer and supplication" (Acts i. 4, 14); and by the inspired Apostle we are exhorted to make "prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for *all* men"; "to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands" (1 Tim. ii. 2 and 8). And we who have in any degree obeyed these precepts, can set our seal to the fact that prayer is indeed a power, that still the "open reward" follows its exercise; and that Pentecostal blessings still descend in answer to the Church's united cry. Oh, to realize the Almightiness of this power which God has placed in our hands!

Nehemiah

BY REV. F. BOURDILLON, M.A.

"The king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."—Nehemiah ii. 8.

Nehemiah was one of the Jews of the Captivity, residing at the court of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. He lived nearly a hundred years after Cyrus let the Jews go back to Jerusalem; but his family was one of those that did not go back. His father, Hachaliah, was settled, it seems, at Shushan, or Susa, where the king had a palace; and there Nehemiah became cup-bearer to the king.

But he felt a deep interest in the welfare of Jerusalem and of his countrymen there; and so, when Hanani and other men of Judah came to Shushan, he made anxious inquiry of them on this subject. Their answer was as follows: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." For though the temple had been rebuilt, yet either the wall and gates of the city had still been left in that state of ruin to which they had been brought a hundred and fifty years before, or the enemies of the Jews had broken them down again when partly repaired.

This report filled Nehemiah with grief. When he heard these words, he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed. It is a very simple, humble, earnest, believing prayer. He acknowledges the sins of himself and his people, yet pleads for mercy; and that on the ground of God's word and promise. For though God had said that if Israel transgressed He would scatter them among the nations, He had graciously added, that if they would turn to Him and keep His commandments, then, though "cast out into the uttermost part of heaven," yet He would gather them from thence and bring them again to Jerusalem. This promise Nehemiah pleaded with the Lord in prayer on behalf of his people. And then, at the close, he made this special petition for himself, with reference to what he was about to do: "And prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

"For I," he adds, "was the king's cup-bearer"; and he had it in his mind to make use of his approach to the king in that capacity for the benefit of his people. But he would do nothing without prayer. Before he approached man he would approach God. Did it not rest with God to dispose the king's heart to be kind? Nehemiah not only believed that it did, but in simple faith he acted on the belief. Before he went in to the king—"this man," as he called him—he besought God to grant him mercy in his sight.

He teaches us a lesson here. Sometimes we find ourselves placed in such circumstances that our happiness, comfort, or safety seem to depend on the will of a fellow-creature; for the moment that man's favour appears of more importance to us than all besides. Yet it is never so really. The favour of God, not of man, is of first importance to us at all times. Even this very thing, which seems so completely to depend on a man's will, and to be within a man's power to give or not to give, even this rests in truth not with man but with God; for all events and all hearts are under His control. Let us always then seek God first. Before we go to man, let us go to God. Before we use means, let us ask Him to bless them. Before we take the first step in any matter, let us beg Him to guide and help us.

Having thus sought help of God, Nehemiah waited for an opportunity. But this did not come immediately. No less than four months passed between his prayer and his going in to wait on the king as his cup-bearer. There were probably many cup-bearers, who waited in turn; and no one might go into the king's presence out of his turn, or without leave. In his anxiety, it was doubtless a trial to him to wait so long; yet

probably this called forth more prayer. Thus are we often called to wait. Naturally we are impatient of waiting. We want to act at once; especially when we are in anxiety about any person or thing, and the case, as we think, is likely to grow worse by delay. And if our feelings have been deeply moved, or if, like Nehemiah, we have prayed, and received comfort and encouragement for action, then we are all eagerness to act at once. Instead of this, we are often called to sit still and wait. Thus God teaches us that the time is to be His, not ours; and thus He gives occasion for perseverance in prayer; and tries and exercises our submission to His will, our patience, and our faith. How much of a Christian's duty consists in waiting!

At length however the time arrived when Nehemiah had to appear at court, and wait on the king as his cup-bearer. Up to that time he had been of a cheerful countenance and manner, such as Eastern kings loved to see in those about them; but now his sadness was such as to attract the king's attention. So he asked him, perhaps in some anger, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Either these words, or the fear of displeasing the king by his reply, made Nehemiah "very sore afraid." Yet he did not shrink from answering openly and truly. "Let the king live for ever," said he, using the common form of salutation to kings; "why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"

The sincerity and feeling with which he spoke made a favourable impression on the king. "For what," said he, "dost thou make request?" Again, before answering, Nehemiah put up a silent prayer to God, "So I prayed to the God of Heaven." The king was absolute in power, and probably capricious in temper; one word that was not pleasing to him might make him angry, and set him against Nehemiah and his petition, for it was no light or usual thing that he was about to ask. So, before answering, he put up a momentary prayer, asking doubtless for wisdom and courage, and that the king's heart might be made favourable to him.

How great is our happiness, that we like him may seek God at any time and in any place! There stood Nehemiah before the great king Artaxerxes in his court. The queen sat by him, and the courtiers and servants were all around. Was this a place for prayer? Besides, there was but a moment of time. The king asked a question; Nehemiah must answer it; there must be no delay: yet one moment was enough for him to lift up his heart in secret prayer. We too may pray, if need be, in public, in company, in a crowd; and in any strait or difficulty, one moment's uplifting of the heart to God will bring us help. No one knew that Nehemiah prayed; and none but God will know when we thus put up a silent petition. But He will know.

Seeing that he sought help from God, we are not surprised to find that Nehemiah made his request to the king wisely and well; addressing him humbly and respectfully, yet going straight to the point. "If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldst send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it." It was no small thing to ask; that he might leave his employment, and go for a time to a distant country: worldly wisdom would have told him perhaps to sound the king's disposition, and prepare the way before making such a request; but God's ways are simple and direct, and Nehemiah, taught by God, went straight to the point.

The king was not displeased. "For how long," asked he, "shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return?" Nehemiah mentioned some time, and then the king gave him leave to go. But now Nehemiah, emboldened by this kindness, asked further that letters might be given him to the governors of the provinces through which he must pass, commanding them to help him on his way, and also a letter granting him timber for the repairs at Jerusalem. This request also was granted; and so Nehemiah received all that he asked for, more perhaps than he had dared to hope.

The words in which he relates his success are remarkable: "And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." He ascribes all, not to his own wisdom or boldness, and not to the king's kindness, but to the blessing of God. He had prayed at every step, and he takes his success as God's answer to prayer. Is not this sometimes overlooked, even by those who pray? Sometimes, when danger, difficulty, or need has led to earnest prayer, and help or deliverance has come, the grace that sent it is forgotten. This should not be. God should be acknowledged in His gracious doings. Praise for blessings received should be as hearty and earnest as prayer for blessings needed. In receiving, as well as in seeking, we must look above second causes. To God be all the glory!

Nehemiah

BY REV. R. W. BURTON, M.A.

"I am doing a great work," etc.—Nehemiah vi. 3.

It was at a very interesting period of the history of the Jewish people that these words were spoken. Their captivity in Babylon had ended, and such as the Spirit of God had roused were now returned to their own land. Amongst those who still, for various reasons, remained behind, we find one individual who was raised by the Persian monarch to an office of the highest trust. It seems to have been by the peculiar providence of Almighty God that Nehemiah, of whom I speak, was advanced to the dignity he held as cup-bearer to the king. He thus had free access to the monarch, and could introduce or urge his suit at the most fitting moment. Through this kind providence of God, the Jews had for the most part, as we said, retraced their steps to Palestine; but it was to a land of affliction and distress that they returned. Jerusalem was waste—its gates were burned. It was opened to the attacks of the surrounding hostile nations. Tidings of the sad condition of his beloved city reached the ears of Nehemiah. He is filled with grief, and he pours out his complaint before the Lord. That gracious Being, Who is emphatically styled "the hearer of prayer, brought it to pass, that the sadness of His servant's countenance should attract the notice of the monarch before whom he stood. Whereupon the king asks the cause of his sorrow, to which Nehemiah, though "sore afraid," replies, "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" Then the king said to Nehemiah, "For what dost thou make request?" At this unexpected condescension, the faithful Nehemiah is well-nigh overwhelmed, especially when he reflects that on the moment hinges the important interests of his native land. But he knows where to resort in that moment of difficulty. "So I prayed," are his simple words, "unto the God of Heaven," and he was not disappointed of his hope. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water, He turneth it whithersoever He will," and Artaxerxes grants the petition of Nehemiah to be permitted to build the city of his fathers' sepulchres, and dismisses him with letters to the governors beyond the river, that they also may further the object he has in view, affording him personal protection, and giving him materials for the work he has in hand.

So Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, and like a wise builder, he takes an accurate survey of the work to be performed. At night he goes the rounds of the city walls. We may well imagine how sad and mournful was that night's perambulation when, as he paced his lonely rounds, he remembered Zion's former beauty, and contrasted its present state of desolation. He returns from it nowise disheartened; but summoning the people and their rulers together, he says, "Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach." "And they said, Let us rise and build." The most effective measures are forthwith taken, the labour being divided systematically amongst the parties engaged in the honourable but laborious work.

But the work was not destined to proceed without interruption and opposition. There were those "whom it had grieved exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel." Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, with other enemies, conspired to disconcert and hinder Nehemiah in his pious undertaking. They devised many plans—first, they employ ridicule and contempt. Next, they charge Nehemiah with a rebellious intention. Failing to disconcert him by these means, they resort to violence; and being baffled in this attempt also, they finally have recourse to stratagem. They endeavour to decoy him away from his work and his defences, to induce him to descend into the plain on pretence of a conference. But the wise builder returned the memorable answer recorded in the words of my text: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

Brethren, the words of Nehemiah are those of every true-hearted builder in every time and place—every man who is thoroughly in earnest and thoroughly impressed with the importance of his work. You will find it the case in every department of this world's labours. But it is the Christian builder with whom we have to do. And if we analyse the employment in which he is engaged, we shall see a thousand-fold greater necessity

lying upon him for steadfastness and resolution and watchfulness.

In what does the greatness of the Christian's work consist? In nothing that this world esteems of value or importance; but in everything that is really and abidingly so. It is not the achievement of victory over peoples and nations. It is not of the nature of those exploits for which monuments of marble and brass are raised. It is not the surmounting peril and danger and fatigue in the path of discovery. The great work the Christian is occupied about is in other fields and with other objects in view. Sometimes it is not discernible by the eye of man, as it is not appreciated by the natural mind. It is the subjugation of the inner man with its evil affections and lusts. It is the gradual formation of internal principles and modes of right thinking and right acting. It is the progressive advance in self-knowledge and acquaintance with God. Then as regards the Christian in his character as a member of the body of Christ, his great work lies in the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom, which is not of this world—in the raising that spiritual fabric which is destined to last for ever—in the searching out, directly or indirectly, the tribes of man that have not yet heard of the fame of Jesus or of His mighty works, and thus making manifest the savour of His knowledge in every place. Oh! that the Christian were more alive to the greatness of the work in which he is engaged, that as regarded himself, he saw more of its inexpressible importance—having such professed objects in view and such results in anticipation—that if there be reality in them, they are worth every sacrifice, every toil. Yes, if they are worth anything, they are worth everything. And that as regards the world around—oh! that he felt more the importance of the position he holds as a fellow-worker with Christ—as an agent for Heaven—as an almoner for God; for when he scatters the bread of life, and is instrumental in bestowing the true riches on the hungry and the poor, is he not an almoner for God?

We have considered Nehemiah's answer to Sanballat as that of the Christian to the enemy of his soul, and the cause he has in hand. But perhaps there are some here who never looked at the Christian in this light of a builder for eternity, who have never seriously laid to heart the importance of the work in which yet, by profession at least, they have voluntarily engaged. And they wonder why it should be characterised as "a great work"—nothing being easier in their minds than "so to pass through things temporal, that finally things eternal" may be attained unto and enjoyed. Brethren, it is a great work in which the Christian is engaged; and if you think lightly of it, or lowly of it, it is because you have never yet thoroughly and heartily engaged in it. True, that to become interested in the great salvation requires but to embrace the Saviour in the arms of our faith; but who, save he that has experienced them, can tell the struggles between unbelief and faith, the agonies of an awakened conscience, the terrors, the waves and billows that go oftentimes over the soul ere it finds peace and rest in the haven where it would be? And who can tell, save he who has thoroughly and in earnest began the work, the difficulties that beset him as he strives after the attainment of that character he is called to sustain, and the subjugation of those evil and earthly propensities to which he is prone?

True, that even as the act of believing unto salvation, so the continued acts of holiness and conformity to the mind and will of God, are wrought out under the direct agency of the Spirit of God; but we are called upon to discipline our hearts, to correct our tempers, to form our habits, to cease to do evil, learn to do well; in a word, to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, notwithstanding that we have the blessed assurance—and the inspiring, animating nature of that testimony, who can sufficiently express?—notwithstanding, I say, that it is "God who worketh in us to will and to do of His good pleasure."

The work is great and of incalculable importance; and thereof we may be the more assured, when we contemplate the efforts employed to divert our attention and hinder our progress. We have seen that violence and falsehood, ridicule and stratagem, were used in turn against Nehemiah, and they have been, and they are, used against the Christian builder. There is, consequently, need in his case too of steadfastness, and watchfulness, and wisdom.

To keep us resolved in our course, let us get clear views of the greatness of the work in which we are engaged, and of its vast importance. Keep on a high platform. Beware of the low ground. Realise to your minds the dignity of your position; and when the efforts of the great foe are directed against you—and the world, the flesh, and the devil would drive or draw you from your stronghold—address them as Nehemiah addressed

Sanballat. Say to the world, "I am doing a great work, I cannot come down to you." The necessary requirements of my station; these shall have my attention, but I must take a higher platform than the men of this world adopt, whereon to do them. I must take a higher aim; a higher standard—I must look to a higher award. I shall not be slothful in business, but I must be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. My only safety is keeping above you. I know the ensnaring nature of intercourse with you; that you offer much; but I know that "you keep the word of promise to the ear, yet break it to the hope," and I remember that it is written, "What shall it profit a man were he to gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul?"

Say to the flesh when it solicits to those things which "war against the soul," "I cannot come down to you. I am enlisted in the service of a God of holiness—I am occupied about holy things. I cannot parley with you. I know thy power—that, 'thou hast cast down many wounded, yea many strong men have been slain by thee.'"

Say to the arch-enemy of souls, "To come down to thee would not only delay the work in which I am engaged, but cause it altogether to cease; and though thou shouldst transform thyself into an angel of light, thy object can be but one—to destroy my work and me. I am no match for thee. I am safe only in my intrenchments, and on the wall, and in my work."

There were many motives which operated to prevent Nehemiah's compliance with the request of those who would have had him to cease from his work. His own safety was concerned in the undertaking he had in hand. Jerusalem's hopes were fixed on him, and assuredly the eyes of many a friend and foe watched the progress of his work.

The Christian finds motives of a like kind, leading him to be "steadfast and immovable" in his work. There is *one* motive, however, which could not operate upon Nehemiah. Oh! how it should act upon Christians. He built for time, we for eternity. I say not he had no higher hopes and aims and prospects. Nay, I am assured he had. But in this work of which he speaks in the passage before us, he built only for time, and now not a vestige of his work remains; but the Christian builds for eternity, and his work shall abide. What a motive *this* for sedulous and unwearied exertion!

Shallum and his Daughters

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"*Shallum . . . and his daughters.*"—*Nehemiah iii. 12.*

Among the people under the influence of Nehemiah, we are told of Shallum, the ruler of half Jerusalem, "and his daughters." This shows how whole families were stirred up. This was better than even inciting individuals to work. Here the women wrought. We know not whether they actually did manual labour, but it would appear so. Of course we do not approve of women working at that which is heavy toil, but this was an exceptional time. It was like the siege of San Sebastian, when women beat back the invaders. Shallum's daughters, like many others, had a mind to work. Why should they be hindered? They had enthusiasm and spontaneity. They were only women, but they could work. The tide was sweeping past, why should they not seize an opportunity! Many of those to whom Nehemiah spoke, would let it sweep by, but Shallum and his daughters would not. They went to work at once. They acted not only as those who strike when the iron is hot, "but who make it hot by striking."

Shallum and his daughters went to *work in an orderly way*. Shallum repaired "next unto" Malchijah, and he next to Hattush, and so back to Eliashib the high priest. Each took his share. The priests built their part. The rulers and even these daughters of rulers built theirs. Great is the value of division of labour, even as we see in politics, literature, newspaper work, commerce, manufactures, to make a power.

In the Church this is introduced with advantage. No one man should attempt to do everything. Even the best minister cannot do everything. Work is a benefit to others, as well as to himself. In an army it is well that a general should know the state of the commissariat department, but it would be absurd for him to be looking after waggons of provisions, when he should be directing from some eminence the movement of this wing of the army or an onslaught by that. He must plant a battery here, or dislodge one there. While thinking of victuals he might lose a

victory. Now in building the walls of Jerusalem, some would mix the mortar, others bear bricks, others place the masonry, others clear rubbish, others prepare plans, guide or watch. Some had to work with sword on thigh and trowel in hand. They had to bend to brick-laying at one time, and then at another "stand like the brave with the face to the foe." We see, then, in the mention of the fact that daughters of Shallum engaged in wall building, that there was a work for all. Those who had not skill enough for one thing, had it for another. We are not sure that these daughters of the ruler actually carried stones and hods of mortar, but it would appear that they really toiled, not only in preparing food for the labourers, but in removing rubbish and setting up the wall.

There is a place in Nature for everything, for the butterfly to flit from flower to flower, and eagle from crag to crag, for the violet as for the azalia, the coral-moss as for the camelia. So there is a place for the Hebrew maiden in the Syrian home as for the Queen of Sheba in Solomon's court; for the poor sorrowing, sinning woman, who could only wash Christ's feet with her tears, as well as the wife of Herod's steward, who ministered unto Him with her own substance; for a Martha as well as for a Mary; for a Rhoda, who answered the door for a Peter, as well as for a Priscilla, who could help the great Apostle to the Gentiles. We should all know for what position we are fitted and fill it. We shall find our work and position in trying to do something for Christ.

Now the action of these daughters of Shallum,—the only women mentioned as helping in the work,—would have great effect in stirring up others and strengthening their hands to the good work. Confidence in their own powers was gone on the part of the people. They were few and impoverished. Many would say, "Why cannot things remain as they are?" They excused their own indifference by pretending that the state of things was good, but when they saw these women at work they must have been put to shame. It would go round the walls with electric swiftness, that even the daughters of the ruler of half Jerusalem were toiling at the work.

Difficulties *had to be removed or ignored*. One or two can do much to chill where they might help. Tardy help has a depressing effect also. "He gives twice who gives quickly." He does double work who is prompt to begin.

In the state of the world and Church there is much in its divisions, laxity, worldliness, onslaught of opponents, to cause gloom, but are we therefore to slacken effort? Shall we give up effort to convert the world? Are we to conclude that the truth of Christ is unimportant? Let us prove its truth by being in earnest for it. Let us not be ashamed of religion or of our principles. Religion is not something to be hidden away, or merely tolerated, it is to be an active power in the soul leading to the conquest of spiritual difficulties.

The action of Shallum was backed up by those most nearly related to him. If his own family worked, surely others would do so. There was consistency of conduct in that family. So should it be in the family of the Church. The minister may preach, but if only the truths uttered in the pulpit could be carried out in the lives of Christians, the world would soon see the beauty of holiness and the glory of the Gospel. If only the rubbish could be removed, the excrescences cut off, breaches in the walls repaired, bitterness and bigotry removed, jealousy and sectarian pride banished, worldliness buried, then would rise the true temple, then would appear the lofty walls of Divine defence, then would the glory of our Lord appear and "all flesh see it together."

Shallum and his daughters knew the difficulty of the work, found out how wearisome it was, but they were probably most depressed at the indifferent and lethargic state of many of the people. We can hear them cheering themselves and others, "strengthening their hands to the good work" by various remarks. Perhaps they went to one and another and said, "See, we are getting strong by working. It does not injure us." This would be true. Effort always strengthens. The arm that wields the sword and works the trowel becomes more muscular through the effort. These women could do by the effort what would have seemed at one time impossible.

But we hear them also speaking jubilantly of the time approaching when the walls will be finished and Jerusalem no longer at the mercy of its foe. Remember that anticipation of accomplishment was a strength. Their imagination had been fired. They seemed already to see the work accomplished. They saw those battered and broken walls rising again. They saw them the pride of the people, and protection of the Temple that was in Shiloh. Soon again they would be able to sing with gladness, "Go round

about Jerusalem, mark ye well her towers, consider her bulwarks, her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following."

There is a great power in this anticipation, whether it regards our individual work, our business, or the Church, or the future of truth in the world. We see what hope, peace and joy would be brought to the world if it could be induced to accept the doctrines of the Cross, and the anticipation is a strength. If we despaired of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in some way or other we should be utterly paralysed. But we believe that the power which broke down our individual opposition to the truth, and removed the burden of our guilt, can do the same for others.

Now while these women were thus strengthening, cheering, stimulating others, they gained fresh power themselves by seeing others aroused. There was a *reciprocal* influence. One piece of coal however bright and burning will go out if placed by itself. Let it be near another piece and the fresh air will be drawn up between and feed the flame. The daughters of Shallum fed the flame and others soon brought more fuel. So if there is a fire of earnestness, persistency, and of love in the Church, souls will be drawn closer together. Anything that hinders this spirit of co-operation is to be strongly deprecated. It is like a chilling east wind on young plant life. Let there be a spirit of love, a fervent desire to bless souls, an intense search for truth, a hatred of cant, a manliness of spirit, a purity of motive, a firm attachment to the Cross, and these will kindle fire in others. From these the fire will spread further and further until there shall be a circle of praise, with this as the refrain, "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad."

People like to work together. The solitude of some work is oft its greatest burden. Man likes for work or for play a mass. He catches fire from numbers. The sight of others in earnest is a strength to him.

Then again we can see in the fact of Shallum and his daughters working that there was a *united spirit*. Nehemiah was nervous lest this should be lacking. Hence he went alone to view the extent of the needed work. He had a mind to work (iv. 9). But there were many who were opposed. Some of the nobles "put not their necks to the work of the Lord." Some sneered and said, "If a fox go up it will break down their stone wall. It is women's work only." What an awful thing to check a good work! People, however, can do much if only they are united and have the will. Work kept them united. They could not afford to quarrel. They could not afford to go whispering and weakening. They were mutually needed. The eye and hand of each one was needful to his fellow, while the trumpet was the signal for all.

Shallum and his daughters saw also that there was *strength from things in which before there would have seemed no sign of encouragement*. Things might have been worse. Certain men were present who were just fitted to carry on the work. Certain materials were near to hand and facilities for moving them were greater than they thought. The wall had some parts that needed no repair. They had to stop gaps, not build a whole wall. Always some advantages appear in any difficult work if we seek for them. Add to this the fact that Nehemiah had come, that he had been brought to think of the work in such a remarkable way, and that the good hand of God had guided him so far in his work. Seeing all these things strengthened their hands, so that they held the trowel and wielded the sword with greater force.

With respect to the work of any individual Church at this day, there is often in one or other of the particulars mentioned something of encouragement to be found. Each Church is necessary to the whole. No one Church could be destroyed without some damage to others. If one Church suffers the whole suffers with it more or less. If one Church is prosperous its influence is sure to extend to others.

What we have each to do is to seek to build up with vigour the individual Church with which we are connected. We should be associated with it from conviction, and hold only such principles as we can with a good conscience, and then working for this one we are working for the whole.

It is well to seek to carry out some good scheme, to foster some flagging agency, to infuse vigour into the fainting heart. How much one may do!

Fellow-Christians, work still more earnestly for Christ. God is with you. His strength is our strength; His work our work. March on, ye hosts of God, seeking to conquer sin, to win souls, to seize the world for Christ. Lift up His royal banner. Ever listen to the clarion of conquest. Ever carry in one hand the sword of spiritual truth, and in the other, like Nehemiah's helpers, the trowel of active service. Do that which is nearest at hand. Realise the issues at stake. Remember that you stand on the platform of

glorious times. Never did the Christian Church command more attention, and possess a wider influence. Strengthen, strengthen your hands then, for this good work of the upholding of Christ's truth, for the sustenance of public worship, for the preservation of the material buildings, for the spread of the Holy Word, for the winning of souls, for the advancement of Christ's Church, and for the salvation of the world. Strengthen, strengthen your hands for the noblest work on earth, and that which gives occasion for the greatest joy in Heaven. Never be put to shame by Shallum and his daughters.

Meshullam

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"*Meshullam the son of Berechiah.*"—*Nehemiah iii. 30.*

Nehemiah aroused the Jews to the need to build walls for their protection. The defences were broken down and had to be restored, Jerusalem had been defiled and had to be cleansed. The work was worth doing, and many helped to the best of their ability.

Wall-building is most important work. Fields and orchards, gardens and plantations need the hedge or dyke or wall. The fortress is not a fortress without ramparts or wall. There must be a defined line and raised defence. Thus in Christianity there must be definite doctrine. Mere loose opinions have no power to convert or preserve. A clear system of doctrine is a great power.

So, in respect to Church organisation. A definite condition of membership is like a strong wall. A well-arranged system is a strong wall. An individual may be removed, but a system stands. Whether in respect to doctrine or the Church the work of wall-building is most necessary, especially at this day, when religion has so many hydra-headed opponents. Wall-building for the welfare of Jerusalem or preservation of the Church should call forth the energies of all who can help.

In building the material wall of Jerusalem nearly all dwellers therein rendered assistance. We are told of various men who built each over against his house, but among the builders was one Meshullam, who built over against his "chamber." Priests and Levites, merchants and artificers, princes and rulers worked, each repairing a piece of the wall; but one man who possessed one room in a certain locality repaired "over against his chamber." All helped.

We find that Meshullam was one of the chief men,—one of the "men of understanding" who was selected by Ezra to be one of those who should supply the lack of service usually performed by the Levites. (Ezra viii. 16.)

Again we find that he was one of those who repaired a section of the wall next to the son of Koz (Neh. iii. 4). His action contrasted strongly with the meanness of the nobles who "put not their necks to the work of the Lord." He not only repaired the portion equal to that the others undertook, but he repaired the part opposite the chamber in which he appears to have lodged. This was *extra work*. Every Christian should be a Meshullam, for Christian work at this day calls for effort on the part of every individual adherent. None must stand aloof. Deep anxiety rests upon all who are attached to Christ and His Word, because of the numerous attacks made on the Church by the Sanballats and Tobiahs of scepticism, of self-righteousness and self-indulgence. They know that indifference and worldliness are working great damage, and their desire is to see all in earnest to live the truth, to spread the truth, to build up the defences of truth.

We should use life for the purpose for which God has given it. We are "not our own." We may not look only on that which concerns our immediate welfare, but on that which concerns others. Each one is under obligations to others. Each one should seek to know Christ and to live in the Christly spirit. If we choose to neglect our own spiritual welfare we have no right to neglect that of others, or to live so as to work damage to others. On every one rests this obligation. It cannot be evaded, none may dodge it. We may not fold our arms and say we have nothing to do with the Christian work. If we are Christians we may not be lazy. Work or corrupt is the law of nature. Better to be killed by work than to decay by idleness. There is so much around us—so much in the world, the neighbourhood, the Church, the home, and our own hearts—calling for effort. We must strive to imitate Meshullam, and do our best to set up that which shall be a comfort to others as well as a means of preservation to ourselves.

Suppose we should be classed among the do-nothing Christians at last! What if we have had no eyes to see and no hearts to feel for the misery of others! Suppose we have toiled hard for our own pleasure, but we have sat selfishly still while souls have drifted down to destruction; shall not we at last hear the dreadful word, "Depart"? Shall not we go to our own place? Our Church association would be nothing, our sins of omission and commission everything, and we should merit banishment from the presence of the good and just as well as from before Him Who searches the heart impartially.

Doubtless Meshullam was stimulated to effort by gratitude for deliverance from captivity. If we are Christians we should remember what we owe to God for His working for us. We ought to love Him. He not only provides for us materially but spiritually. Think of how He worked out salvation for us, and how by His Spirit He "strives" with us. He has delivered many of us from a worse than Babylonish captivity, and ought we not to do that which will be most pleasing to Him, viz., strive to bless others and build them up in truth and love? The extent of our ability is the measure of our obligation. Nothing, however, should be done only by constraint as a duty. Love should impel us to earnest effort for God in this world. We should do all we do in a bright sunshiny spirit. We should not check joy by our method of working. "To assassinate a sunbeam is a crime, and the criminal serves out the penalty in the prison-house of his own nature." "A smile is the soul's sunlight." Let it accompany the word of truth and the deed of love. We should throw ourselves cheerfully into all we undertake. We should embody ourselves in deeds. Not idleness, but zeal and deeds will gain immortality. Apart from concentrated effort, there is no joy or peace here or hereafter. When we look on those who suffer and sorrow, who are led captive by evil habits, who are being ensnared by temptation, who are troubled, hopeless, despairing, we see that we ought to do all we can to bring to them sunshine and assistance.

Meshullam teaches us that we should be willing to do extra work. What are we doing? Perhaps at times we are only drifting through life, or at best merely thinking of our own eternal safety. We may even have some hope that Christ's truth and Church will prevail, but we do as little towards its success as is consistent with the bare maintenance of a Christian profession. We never devise any liberal thing. We never do any extra piece of work like that of Meshullam, when he built "over against his chamber," as well as on other parts of the wall. He devised liberal things; went beyond the line of exact requirement. He measured not himself by others in this extra work. This extra work done in the world and Church is often the most useful. If we only do just that which is required as duty, we show that we have no love for our work or for that for which we work. Think of the mass of overwork done by many in the region of politics, art, literature, medicine, hospital attendance, public service, Sunday School teaching, and speaking at meetings. Such work can never be paid for, or its value estimated.

Some wait so long to *be shown* what they should do. They have to be pushed into work. They stand shivering on the brink of an attempt, and fear to launch away. They think of the cold and danger. They tremble at the plunge. They lack courage, dash. We might say to such, jump in, and sink or swim, do your best for that cause which you believe in. Do not go asking too much advice. Sydney Smith said pointedly, "It will not do to be perpetually calculating tasks and adjusting nice chances; it did very well before the flood, where a man could consult his friend upon an intended publication for a hundred and fifty years, and then live to see its success afterwards; but at present a man waits and doubts and hesitates and consults his brother, and his uncle, and particular friends, till one fine day he finds that he is sixty years of age, and that he has lost so much time in consulting his first cousin and particular friends, that he had no more time to follow their advice." Whatever regular or extra work we find to do, we should do readily, brightly, courageously and lovingly, seeking to recognise ever the grace of God Who suggests, guides, upholds and blesses all honest work in the world or Church.

Meshullam's act of building "over against his chamber" teaches us also to mind the smaller gaps, the over-looked spaces, the trifling and the obscure points. The space opposite his chamber might be narrow, but it would be sufficient for many enemies to pass through. They would be sure to detect the undefended part. Though a few inches, a traitor might creep to throw open the city gates. A weak link in a cable is enough to risk the welfare of the vessel. A slight flaw in a cannon will make it useless.

If loaded it might burst and kill its possessors rather than the enemy for whom its shot was intended. The loose wheel in a watch may make us miss an engagement of great importance. The slight flaw in the axle of a locomotive or the coupling iron may plunge a train down an embankment, and send many souls into eternity. For the sake of the small piece of wall before Meshullam's chamber the city might be lost. He, however, takes care to build "over against his chamber." We should attend not only to the smaller duties when working for Christ, but when seeking to grow inwardly we should be careful as to trifling actions. Character as well as business success is made up of attention to trifles. Let the light of Christ shine in every thought and act, even as the sun peeping over the hills clothes not only the houses and trees, but every blade of grass and patch of moss, with glory. No part of our nature should be hidden from the power of Christ's love and light.

It is a common conclusion that character is seen in little things. Positions have been attained and fortunes made by some trifling act. This extra working on the part of Meshullam in an apparently unimportant part of the wall, is a hint of good in his character. The whole of mankind, moreover, are benefited,—such is the solidarity of the race—by any trifling improvement in a single individual. A gap has been stopped; a space has been filled, a wall of defence has been completed and God has been also thereby glorified.

Meshullam teaches us to do that which lies nearest to us. Our duty is "over against us." At every step duty faces us. We need not be looking to the right and to the left for that which we should do. It is at hand. Do that which seems needful, that to which conscience, in however slight a degree, impels. Attend to the minutiae. The great thing we desire to do is the enemy of the smaller and useful we might do. We could undertake responsible tasks, but not the obscure. Some men are so absorbed in schemes of gigantic extent, so that they neglect that which is of immediate importance. They think of the race but kick aside the individual. They can plead for the better housing of the poor, but would not once go even to look at the underground dwellings of London. They can seek to evangelize Labrador but forget to speak to their own children or servants of Christ. Like the lawyer who came to Christ, they ask, "Who is my neighbour?" and like the Levite, when they see him lying in their very path, they "pass by on the other side." They would be ready to help a Nehemiah to build the *whole* wall, but they would never, like Meshullam, be found building the small part "over against their chamber."

It were well if we could end here our contemplation of the character of Meshullam. Alas! he seems to have become an illustration of the evil effect of worldly entanglement when pursuing spiritual work. Further on in Nehemiah we read (vi. 18) that Johanan the son of Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews, had married the daughter of Meshullam. "In those days the nobles of Judah,"—the lazy ones who put not their necks to the work—"sent many letters unto Tobiah." Many in Judah were sworn to Tobiah. They were traitors to the cause. Tobiah was able to keep up through them an agitation that was most irritating and injurious. Tobiah sent by them messages and letters to "put Nehemiah in fear." Think of the active and generous Meshullam being drawn into such evil doings! Yet by the way it is recorded we cannot but come to the conclusion that he was involved in the mean business. He who had been the generous deviser and great helper may have become a dangerous hinderer. His position gave him power to check that which he had once hastened to press forward. We know that he neglected to obey the laws of Moses. The atmosphere of the land of captivity had relaxed his moral sense and strict habit of obedience to the Divine will. Owing to this he consented to the alliance with an alien and an enemy of Judah. Doubtless he thought he could keep clear of any ill consequences, but, though "a man of understanding, he may yet have been unwise enough to be inveigled into "giving countenance to that which his better nature condemned."

It is not enough that we begin well, that we at first go beyond others in holy designs and efforts, we must seek to maintain our faithfulness to Christ and His cause, even to the end. We are sure to find that when the first fires of emotion and spiritual earnestness have somewhat burnt down, influences will be brought to bear upon us that might even extinguish them altogether. It is most imperative, therefore, that we keep up association with those who are like-minded, with those who have a steady, fervent devotion to Christ and His Kingdom, and who are doing their best to build the walls of Jerusalem. The sleek, subtle, sneering, selfish Tobiahs abound both in regions of

theological thought and of business activity. If they can drag young or old Christians into association with themselves, they will be encouraged in their own false ways. And those thus entangled, will sorrow over the conscious, internal, spiritual damage of which they are sensible, or over the evil which they have wrought to the cause once so dearly cherished.

There is nothing for us in our Christian course but to keep near to the Saviour by prayer, by reading and meditation, and by the Holy Spirit, so shall we ever be earnest, bright, sunshiny, useful men like Meshullam in his best days, and avoid such entanglements as those which have been hinted at. Anyhow let us do what we can, carefully, faithfully and devotedly, to build up Christ's Church. This is really worth effort and life. The ultimate triumph in this world will be that of Christ. No weapon formed against Him or His cause shall prosper. If evil gains a temporary success, it will be by the defection of Christ's professed followers through worldly alliances like that of Meshullam; it will be because men are so busy making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, so absorbed in gaining wealth, or attending to public duties, or seeking pleasure, that they have no energy left to spend for Christ. Let but the old faith be held,—faith in the old doctrines of salvation by Christ and Christ alone; faith in the power of that authoritative revelation once delivered to the saints; let but that faith be held, which sustained a Stephen before the Sanhedrin, a Paul before a Nero, a Luther before an Emperor, a Bunyan before his judge, a Latimer and Ridley before and in the fiery pile, and the future triumphs of the Church shall far outshine those of the past. Over the battlements of the Church, above the walls founded in blood and built up by tears and love, shall be lifted the Cross of Him Who is the one Saviour of our race. Within those walls,—the walls of His own spiritual Church He shall reign "Whose right it is"; and through the gates in those walls shall stream not only the myriads of the redeemed, but all powers of invention, of art, of science, of knowledge, to lay at His feet the offer of willing service and eternal devotion. That day draws on. That time comes near. And every earnest, faithful soul building and toiling at that duty nearest to him, "over against him," is quickening the rate of approach, and gladdening the heart of Him Who died to conquer death, and Who lives to save the world.

Ahasuerus

BY REV. A. RALEIGH, D.D.

"Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus," etc.—Esther i. 1—9.

This Book of Esther stands, as we all know, in the canon of Holy Scripture; but it is no secret that its place there has been challenged. It is said, that Luther expressed a wish, that the Book of Esther was not contained in the Bible. No doubt this wish was grounded, substantially, on those characteristics of the book, negative and positive, which have been drawn out with considerable force by some modern interpreters. It reads, they say, like an Oriental story or romance. It is a tale for the traveller's tent, or for any listening evening group, and, by some mistake, has found its way into the sacred record. In answer, it must be said, that, no doubt, it is a tale, an Eastern tale, and full of Eastern imagery; but then, as it professes to be that, that and nothing else, as far, at least, as the facts of the exterior history go, it is difficult to see what force there can be in the objection. Cannot God write any portion of history in any part of the world, if He sees it needful to do so for the instruction of mankind? The real questions are, how is the tale told? How is the history written? What lessons are drawn from it, or intended to be drawn, by the readers? What Divine instruction given? True, say the objectors; but there is no good instruction in the Book at all. The personages introduced are not good. They are not great morally. The characters delineated are all of a worldly type, or if the religious tone is found in any of them, is is unusually low, hardly recognizable as a religious tone at all. An Eastern despot putting out his personal will as the supreme law of a vast empire, and turning all his wealth and power into means for the gratification of his sensual appetites and passions; a malignant Prime Minister, who can coolly plot the destruction of a whole race of people within the empire, who have done no wrong, but simply because one of their

number has refused to do him a little passing honour; a Jew without patriotism and without much conscience, or he would not, of his own choice, be found sitting at the gate of a heathen sovereign, especially after so many of his brethren have returned to Jerusalem; a fair woman, a Jewess, with not much beauty of soul, and nothing in her nature highly sensitive, or she would not have calmly followed the advice given by her wily relative, and solely with the purposes of ambition—are those the kind of characters which God would be likely to select and describe for the instruction of the world? There really is no force at all in this kind of objection. In our view, it is founded in radical and egregious mistake; for it goes on the supposition, that all characters delineated on the sacred page must be saintly, and that all the historic scenes described in the Bible must have a direct and immediate bearing on the fortunes of the Kingdom of God—which, indeed, they generally have—and that these must be made so plain, that everyone shall be able to see it at a glance. But now, what is the fact? What is the fact about this great Book? The fact is, that all through the Bible there is a perfectly impartial delineation of human character. The good and the evil intermix in the picture, exactly as historic truth requires. The most valuable lessons of wisdom, and some of the most important moral inferences may be drawn from the darkest, or from the poorest, scenes of human history. God alone is the competent judge of our needs and of the needs of mankind. God being judge, we need to know Cain as well as Abel, Jezebel as well as Miriam, the bad kings as well as the good; the loving, broken-hearted women and the scowling Pharisees meet together at the very Cross. Granted that in this Book of Esther there is no clear instance of goodness,—judgment and charity may suppose this or that about Esther and her relative; but there is no clear instance, that we may stand upon, of goodness, at least of the higher type; none the less, however, as I hope we shall see, may the design and the influence of the Book, on the whole and in many ways, be good. It is a very remarkable thing and quite a singular thing—there is no other instance of it among the Books of the Bible—that, throughout the whole Book, there is no mention of the name of “God.” Not once in the Book is the name of “God” mentioned. And this, too, has been made an objection against the Book. It is sufficient however, to reply, with Matthew Henry, that though the name of God be not in it, His finger is. A sermon may have little or no formal mention of the name of Christ; and yet it may take the hearer very near the Cross; and another sermon may be full of the name of Jesus, Jesus sounding perpetually, and yet it may be utterly empty and vacant of the power of the name. The Book is canonical, because it forms part of the Hebrew Scriptures, which all Christians receive of the Jews, who certainly were among the best, if they were not the very best, custodians of sacred literature in the whole world. It forms part of the Hebrew Scriptures, which our Lord received, remember, and sanctioned every time He went into a Jewish synagogue. It must, therefore, be received by us, unless we mean to set up that terrible thing, our own inner taste, or consciousness as supreme, supreme, observe, not only in its own sphere, which is right and absolutely necessary, but also in the realm of history and tradition, and as superior to all external authority. In one way no doubt it is, but in another way external authority is quite superior to the inward. I do not want to speak with any appearance of disparagement even, of what is called the inner consciousness. I dare say we are too ready sometimes to go off upon a phrase, and to turn it into ridicule, if we can, because certain persons in the use of that phrase violate the laws of proportion, and make utterly unfounded assertions; but still that is no excuse for our failing to observe, that there is a grand truth, for instance, in such a phrase as this—the inner consciousness. Why, in the last resort, you know, that is all a man has. You may make as light of it as you will; but if your inner consciousness in some instances and in some points fails you, all fails you; you have nothing else. But now see how very sad it would be to put this faculty, or sense, on the throne in an instance like this. Say now, that my inner consciousness is not pleased with this Book of Esther, therefore I throw it aside; say the Divine finger never wrote it; it can be no book of God to men, at least, it cannot be a book of God to me. But I am induced by some person, wiser than myself, to read and study it, and by degrees I begin to find unsuspected meanings and lessons in it, far reaching applications of principles and adaptations to all times and places, and to a great many persons, and, in short, clear proof I begin to find in the end, that it is of God, and is written for the instruction of men. Well, how very foolish my inner consciousness looks now! How much better it would have been, if I had been more modest and reserved concerning it,—kept it in short to its own proper

place, without any violation, observe,—without any violation or suppression of its own proper dictates, without forcing it to call evil good, or what seemed evil to it good, or darkness light; but just leaving the grand question of exterior authority to be settled by its own laws. Surely that is reasonable.

The author of this Book is not known. It takes its name from the Jewish family whose fortunes are described, described not, as we apprehend, because they are intrinsically worthy of this perpetual elevation and honour, but because they are inseparably associated with the fortunes of the Jewish people and of the whole world by their means. Esther herself, however, is not the writer of the Book. Mordecai, or, more probably, Ezra may have written it. The time is about 480 years before Christ. The captive Jews, under the edict of Darius, had returned to their own land; but they had not all returned. Many of them were content to stay in the country where they were captives, and where, in fact, many of them were born, and where many of them were getting to be prosperous; they are not forsaken; they are not forgotten of God. What Providence is over them this one story makes known.

“Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus.” “Ahasuerus” was apparently the official name of the Persian kings, just as “Pharaoh” was the official name of the Egyptian kings—“(this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven-and-twenty provinces).” Modern criticism has now made it not only probable, but entirely certain, that this Ahasuerus is none other than the famous Xerxes, the Persian monarch, who makes such a figure in Grecian history. This is he, who came in Eastern pomp and magnificence, and with his myriad numbers into Greece, intending to subdue and destroy it as a nation, by annexing it to his own dominions, but who, as secular history informs us, suffered complete and ignominious defeat at Salamis; and you will find, I think, some proof of this even in the very next verse—“that in those days, when the King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, **which was in Shushan the palace.**” Shushan, or Susan, was the royal and principal residence of the Persian monarchs. It was situate about two hundred miles south-east of Babylon, and it was always the residence of the Persian monarchs in winter. Well, he sat on the throne of his kingdom, evidently robed and in royal state. Provinces and peoples behold the glory and render homage. And this is highly characteristic of the man; for Herodotus and Æschylus tell us how he sat on his royal throne, silver-footed, and saw the world-famed martyrdom of Leonidas and his brave 300 Spartans, and the indomitable courage of Themistocles and his Grecian armament at Salamis, when the issue of the conflict was stupendously different from what he had expected; and it is not too much to say, my brethren, that the whole world and all the after ages are debtors to those tremendous death-defying Greeks. But there he sat to set a victory; and, lo, it was changed, as by celestial powers, into an overwhelming defeat. The affrighted monarch rushed from that Athenian hill, and fled with his scattered forces in dismay. But there he sat, and here he sits. It is the same man you see. Here, however, is neither battle nor defeat. The time now is a few years before that expedition was organized. He is in the heart of his own kingdom here. He is on the height of his glory. All his princes and servants are gathered. The nobles and princes of the provinces are before him. He has ordained a feast for them—for them? The feast is to his own pride; for while they feast through all those long days—an hundred and four score days, half-a-year,—he is shewing them “the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty.” There is not a little reason to suppose that this feast was in fact held on the very occasion of his projected invasion of Greece. To fire his soldiers with ardour and fill the minds of his captains with confidence, he makes all this vain display and provides this munificence of self-indulgence. If this be so, with how little result, when the brunt of the struggle came, but exactly the result that might be looked for. Real courage and endurance are bred of much harder conditions than these. Feasting on rich viands, drinking generous wines, looking upon pomp and grandeur, sights of revelry, sinking into voluptuous ease—men are never made brave by such experiences. The Greeks were comparatively few, and they were comparatively poor. Indeed, it is a wonderful thing that the people who have played the greatest part in the great drama of human history in many places in the earth have never been very numerous and, certainly, have never been rich. The Greeks were comparatively few, and they were comparatively poor. Though their country had no vast harvest-bearing fields, they fought for mountains, for seas, for rocks; for with those rocks, and seas, and mountains they had liberty; and the defence of that nerved their arm for the battle,

and enabled them to scatter and drive away like smoke those emasculated Persian hosts. Do not say it is a great distant lesson with which you have nothing to do. We have all to do with it. There can be no doubt that that great law runs through the whole of human life and history, and affects not only nations and communities as such, but families and individuals. Those who are fed from the breast of abundance, who are cushioned on the lap of luxury, feasted with shows of life, exhausted with ceremonies and amusements, may get by such means easy gliding manners, a pleasant willowy softness very convenient for life's ever-shifting necessities; but they do not get by such means inward courage or outward strength for the duties and for the higher possibilities of life. No; stress of difficulty, hard work, plain fare, a touch of privation now and again, the wolf seen from the window, if not quite at the door—these things make men far more likely, at least, than do their opposites, to which I have referred.

The length of this feast is something wonderful—a hundred and four score days! Why a feast of three or four days, I suppose, would tire any of us pretty well; it would be wearisome to us, or it would to any modern monarch. But I suppose the proper interpretation is this, that this was just a festive time; and, observe, it was the custom of the Persians to combine great councils with great festivities. Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, had just won great victories in Egypt. The Egyptian campaign had been preceded by solemn councils and musters of troops. The Grecian campaign had a like beginning, although, as we know, a very different ending. But this accounts quite amply for the long stretch of time, which has been regarded by some as fabulous. The time was really occupied in consultation. The chiefs of the countries and provinces, forming one great empire, came many of them long distances; they need not all have been there at the first; some would come, and some would go. They came that they might take part in the council of war. I dare say they would nearly all meet at one time of the festival. The story of the past would be narrated to many a chief, to many a company. Objections and difficulties would be obviated; and inducements held out to encourage the spirits of any who might be flagging, or disposed to draw back. At the very end of the time, during the last seven days, we read that this feast culminated, expanded, overflowed, became a feast to all, great and small, who were in the capital; and for seven days the whole population was entertained with sumptuous and royal magnificence. Why dwell on the splendour, the wonderful decorations, the rich hangings of the pavilions, the silver rings, the pillars of marble, the couches of gold and silver resting on a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble, every guest treated like a monarch, privileged to drink the royal wine in vessels of gold, according to the state of the king, "the vessels being diverse from one another," meaning that they were never used more than once, being replaced by vessels of other form and pattern as soon as they were emptied. It is a wonderful scene. There is nothing morally great about it at all—nothing. There never can be about mere feasting, and splendour, and eating, and drinking, and outward show—never. Let us be fair. Neither, so far as we can see, is there anything morally wrong about this, at least, when kept in due moderation. It was kept in moderation in this instance. There is the most prodigal abundance; and yet there is a royal wisdom in the dispensation of it. For we read that "the drinking was according to the law," and that law means "no compulsion." Some would render it "no restraint." There might be some allowance even for that rendering, because if every man was left to his pleasure, of course, there would be no restraint within certain bounds, and those the bounds of moderation. The proper rendering, according to the best scholars, is no "compulsion"; the inebriating cup is not to be pressed on the unwilling guest. That custom apparently had been but too common among the Persians and their imitators: but here at this feast are princes from all parts with their retainers and tribes. There are men here, especially, from the mountains, heads of the great mountain tribes, who are very famous for their temperance, and for the simplicity and strictness of their lives. Some of them were quite Puritanic men. Such men would not be won, they would be disgusted and alienated from the royal cause by anything like Bacchanalian excess. From prudence, therefore, if not from any higher motive, the principle of temperance must have the enforcement of public law. None must compel. The dispensing officers must consult every man's pleasure. It is humiliating to think of it, but it is undoubtedly true, that no long time has elapsed since the very same objectionable and even disgusting habit, against which this public law of the Persians was directed, prevailed in some of the social circles of this country. It was a point of hospitality to press the bottle even on the unwilling guest. The generous host hardly

felt that he had done his duty, until his guests were reeling; and if some of them were under the table, the triumph of his beneficence was complete. How sad and shocking it is, for example, to read of the poet Burns demeaning himself so far as to preside as umpire and reckoner at a drinking bout between two great gentlemen. I believe that he has got credit in that natural way, that leads men always to exaggerate any of the failings, or any of the virtues of great men—he has got credit for being himself far more free with the use of liquor than he really was during by far the greatest part of his life. I believe that he was not taking part himself in this drinking bout; but to allow those who did take part in it, to lay down, as it were, their clothes at his feet, the clothes of their rationality and decency—to think that such a man could sit and watch such a process entirely and keep the reckoning of how many bottles were drunk—isn't it shocking? It shows that we are all under the influence of the spirit of the time; and other men, perhaps, nearly as great as he, would have done the same thing. It shows how utterly vitiated and demoralized the public taste of even cultivated people had become on a point like this. England was as Scotland. You may easily cull from the poets of the last century descriptions and allusions pointing to a state of things which happily has now passed away. Indeed, this is our reason for dwelling upon such a subject for even a few moments.

Undoubtedly, in the course of a generation or two, we have in this particular made very great progress. Within the whole circle of what is called society, anything approaching to compulsion would not now be tolerated, in fact, is never attempted. Whether we do not on a wider scale, in fact, as a people and with the force of our legislation, practise compulsion still, and that on the weakest and most helpless part of our people is, I think, a very serious question for this present time. If places where drink is sold to the common people are multiplied far beyond the reasonable needs of the community—and I am one of those who think the community has reasonable needs—if exceptional privileges are given to the sellers, if their houses are planted in the most conspicuous spots, with many exits and entrances, if they burn the brightest lights in the streets and are allowed to keep open long after other trades and industries are shut up and silent, does not all this amount to a kind of compulsion? Of course, it does not go by that name. Men may easily get out of it, and lay any argument that you may advance aside very quickly; but does it not amount to a kind of compulsion to working-people, and tradespeople, and thoughtless young people of both sexes? I think if the spirit of that old Persian law were put into a Licensing Bill, it would be somewhat better than the one we have got—although that seems good, so far as it goes—better for the morals and manners of this time, and for the sobriety of the working-classes, and for the safety of the young. When temptations and inducements are made too strong for the feeble resistance they meet with, and made so, observe, by legislation—special legislation—then, surely, it is clear that the State for its own pecuniary purposes—the State means you and me, and all the rest of us, you know; it is not some separate entity; we are the great State, and we are all responsible for this—I say it seems clear to me, that the State does compel in fact, for she makes the law under which there are so many victims. She gathers the tax which intemperance pays to sustain her magnificence and power. There is a way which, no doubt, is better, and which, after all, is the way on which we must mainly have reliance by way of amendment—I mean the way of the direct operation upon the people, upon their minds and hearts, with a view to the increase of their knowledge of all kinds, to the elevation of their sentiments, to the refinement of their tastes, and to the correction of their habits; and we must hope to see, and we must not doubt that in the end, and, perhaps, ere very long, we shall see, the same process taking place among the masses of the people, which has been accomplished in some considerable measure, although not yet by any means perfectly, among the higher classes. It will not, perhaps, be accomplished with the same ease and quietness. I am not so sure that the question is exactly the same as applied to the great masses of the people as it has been to the privileged and cultivated classes. For one thing, vested interests always die hard, as is natural. Wages are very high; and they seem to be still rising. The spirit of self-indulgence is evidently beginning to infect the working classes as it has never yet done, as powerfully, indeed, as it has ever done the classes above them, perhaps, some of them even more powerfully. I do not believe that religious scepticism is more among the working classes proportionably than among other classes; but there it is no doubt. Some of those strong headed men have it in strength. It is among them as among others. The progress, therefore, towards temperance may be slow and

which outwardly we are moving figures ; then, and only then, we cast anchor within the veil, lay up treasure where it can never be lost, live in the life that cannot die, and with intermittent ; and depend upon it, if we want to keep a good conscience in the matter, we shall all have to do our part by adopting, and advocating, and supporting sound principles of legislation and of action, and still more by the uniform practice of moderation in all things ourselves, because, as this New Testament text which we have taken for a close reminds us, we are of those who believe that the Lord is at hand. We need to eat and we need to drink ; not only so, we may please our taste in eating ; sometimes, indeed, in order to enjoy health the taste must be pleased, and we may refresh and enliven our weariness by drinking of the wine which our Saviour made and blessed ; and we may do this to our friends for their delectation, in their honour, but all in moderation. How the fashion and glory of the world have passed away from that Persian capital ! The palaces, the gardens, the pavilions, the tessellated pavements, the royal couches, the golden goblets, the flowing banquet, the gay throngs, the grand monarch, and the mustering army—they have all gone from the earth like a dream ! The Persian people are among the poorest, among the most abject in the world. Russia has only to put out her mailed hand and Persia would have no existence. England could do the same. Either of them, to say nothing of both of them. And the country—it will hardly support the inhabitants who are there. So fades all exterior glory, so all visible things pass away ; and England's grandeur, depend upon it, is but a part of the ever vanishing procession. The world passeth away ; and our finery and our feasts—all these will go with the rest. But if we embody the principle of moderation in our life, and walk by faith and not by sight, and take the will of God for guidance for solitude and company, for the funeral and for the feast, then, and only then, we surmount the poor pageant in God and all the good abide for ever. Amen.

Vashti

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"Vashti the queen."—Esther i. 9.

Ahasuerus, the Persian monarch, yielded to the allurements of the cup, and acted foolishly. Under its influence he gave way to the desire to exhibit the beauty of his wife and queen to a miscellaneous crowd. He had shown all that he possessed. Anything and everything that could call forth further admiration from his numerous guests had been laid under tribute. At length the king has to ask himself what more he has that can yet again constrain, by its exhibition, approval and praise. The festivities are closing, and he must not linger if he would extort more flattery and adulation.

The king remembers one most precious possession, on which the eyes of his eunuchs and himself only had rested—his Sultana. He is proud of her in somewhat the same sense as that in which a man might, at this day, be proud of having on his wall the finest painting, in his cabinet the rarest jewel, or in his stables the best horse in the country. Had there been, in him, any deep affection for Vashti, he never could have treated her after the fashion recorded. She was to him but a toy, a harem ornament—a slave for whom a goodly price had been paid from out his coffers ; and shall he not, if he choose, exhibit her ? He wishes to send his guests away in the best humour, and therefore resolves to do them the greatest honour—they shall look upon his queen.

Accustomed to have his slightest wish immediately gratified, Ahasuerus orders his chamberlains to bring Vashti with the crown royal on her head, and set her before the people. Probably he flatters himself that even Vashti will be pleased to be thus honoured.

Impatiently the king awaits the arrival of Vashti. Little dreams he of a rebuff. Excited as he is at the close of the festivities, and elated, both by the praise he has received and the wine he has drunk, he is no mood to brook any opposition to his will, or even delay in carrying out his desires.

At length the troop of chamberlains re-appears. The king looks up from his cups. "What, and is not the queen coming ?" He soon hears the explanation of her absence. Bowing low, and in the hesitating tones of one who has a disagreeable task to perform, the chief chamberlain tells, "that the queen refuseth to come at the king's commandment."

"She refuseth to come! Surely my ears deceive me. Refuseth to come! What, a woman disobey me!"

How in a moment is overcast the face hitherto so complacent, the throne of dignity and majesty. A lowering, threatening scowl sits on the king's brow. More swift than any hurricane that ever swept over devoted and unsuspecting voyagers is the storm of anger that now sweeps over the countenance of Ahasuerus. And what a Vesuvius rages in his breast! A *mere woman* to cross him! All his glory, power, and majesty to be by that one woman checked. Most annoying of all, the thought that this refusal of the queen is known to the princes and nobles. They will say, "He cannot bear rule in his own house, and how shall he govern the dominion of Persia?" The king could better endure the obstinate conduct of the queen, were it known only to himself. To have his domestic affairs, however, known abroad; to be the common subject of conversation and condemnation; to be the gossip of the inmates of every harem from one end of his empire to the other; to be the butt of ridicule in every bazaar of the East—this is unbearable. "The king was very wroth, and his anger burned in him."

Those around watch the king's countenance, to trace the effect upon him of the refusal. How readily they follow the mood of the king! Vashti knows not what helpful friends she has at court. Will they take sides with the weak against the strong? Ah, no! It will be more to their interest to pander to the weaknesses of the king. These smooth counsellors find it a very easy matter to persuade one who is already the slave to wine and wrath. Pretending to be afraid of the effect of Vashti's example upon their own spouses, they recommend that she shall be deposed from her position as Sultana, and another chosen in her place. They are astute enough not to suggest the putting away of one toy without having another to fill its place. They dilate so much on the offence of Vashti that Ahasuerus almost comes to think himself the most injured man in the world.

Was Vashti in the wrong? Some would say, Yes: wrong in that she yielded to petulance or pride, or to her sense of security in the affections of the king. It has been the constant practice to blame her; but there may be something to be said at least in extenuation of her conduct.

Let it be remembered how exclusive to this day are the customs of the East with respect to women. The same customs obtained in the time of Vashti. It was not the practice of Persian ladies to appear before any save their husbands, fathers, and sons. When women were found at the feast of Belshazzar, it was through the excesses to which wine and a lascivious idolatry had led. But the queen of Belshazzar was not present (Dan. v. 10), only women of lower rank and character. Hence, when Vashti refused, it was by reason of a custom which she knew the king would not have broken had he not been excited by wine.

Further, Vashti knew that the king, heated by his drinking, would expect that she and her maidens would please the multitude in a way not infrequent. He probably expected dances by the queen and maidens such as that by which, in after times, the daughter of Herodias pleased Herod.

The Jews have a tradition that the commands of the king were such as could not fail to shock a noble and high-spirited woman. But Vashti was possessed of a share of modesty and true queenliness very uncommon in those days; and we strongly suspect that she was perfectly right in refusing to come at the king's command.

By the way in which the narrative is recorded, it would appear, at first sight, that Vashti was over-scrupulous and foolishly obstinate. It would seem as though she contumaciously objected to yield a trifling point. If, however, we knew more of the detail, we should probably not blame Vashti for obstinacy. If we may draw upon the knowledge which secular records of those times give, we shall be inclined rather to believe in the righteousness of Vashti's refusal.

But Vashti has been blamed, not only for disobeying the command of a king, but for refusing the request of her husband. Those make this objection who hold that it is right for a wife to obey in every case her husband's direction. She is to have no will but that of her husband. She is always to yield to the superior knowledge and power of the husband. One has put this idea in a quaint form, saying, that for a wife to act otherwise than in strict obedience, is "to set the rib above the head."

Now, where there is in reality superior intelligence on the part of the husband, it is sure to have sway. But this doctrine of implicit obedience on the part of the wife to one with whom she has contracted *mutual* obligations, is an absurdity as gross and heathenish as that into which Ahasuerus fell when he commanded Vashti to be

exhibited before a crowd. His error was, in thinking that Vashti was simply his property—a slave-queen, for whom his bare word was sufficient law. Many have fallen into the same error since. Marriage should be a state of mutual love, mutual help, and mutual concessions.

Husbands and wives are possessed of equal rights, such as may be claimed and allowed without detriment to the position of either. Ahasuerus did not recognise the rights of Vashti: therefore she took them. As a wife, she would do her duty, but not as a puppet or plaything. She thereby dared his power. She knew how terrible must be the consequences; but she was ready to meet the scorn that would be heaped upon her. All honour to one who in such times, in such a place, and under such circumstances, could dare to withstand the commands of her besotted lord. All honour to one who, taking her stand upon the inviolability and glory of her womanhood, could dare to do the right. Instead of blame for her obstinacy, let her have praise, as well for her moral courage as for her modesty.

It would be a good thing if many who are at this day drawn into scenes of pleasure and sensuous enjoyment would remember Vashti, and dare to do the right. Many women, upon whose faces a blush might shrink to find itself, might with advantage study the character, and strive to follow the example of Vashti. There is still need for the advice which an ancient orator gave to the daughters, sisters, and wives of his day—"to have their eyes painted with chastity, the words of God inserted in their ears, Christ's yoke tied to the neck, to be clothed with the silk of sanctity, the damask of devotion, and the purple of piety."

In Christian lands there is, we are glad to see, much true womanliness and modesty. It would be very painful to find any tendency to boldness and indelicacy among the wives and daughters of our day. It would be like taking all fragrance from the flowers and bloom from the peach. What is needed is, that there shall be withal a greater cultivation of all amiable and noble qualities, combined with a firm faith in the religion of the Saviour. This shall add a richer grace to all other graces. Without this faith, the one essential for a pure and perfect character is lacking. "There is beauty," says one, "in the blush of the rose, and there is a beauty of a higher character in the blush that mantles the cheek of modesty; but there may be as little loyalty to God in the animate as in the inanimate object." Faith in and love to God is most essential as the crown of womanly nature. We rejoice that in so many are found the qualities of amiability, modesty, and loyalty to God. All such will welcome Vashti as their sister.

It is something further to call forth praise, that modesty and moral courage were found in one so *high in rank* as Vashti. Let it be remembered that she was surrounded by many things which would tend only to foster pride and vanity. The influences of a life in a harem must have been adverse to the development of all the finer and nobler qualities of Vashti's nature. Yet she triumphed over them, or she would not have risked rejection by her husband and king, and refused to bend to that which only a drunken humour suggested. Many in less difficult circumstances would not have been so firm and true. They would have excused the state of the king in the honour conferred on themselves. Vanity would have been flattered by being seated aloft, praised and acknowledged as most beautiful, even though by the side of a sottish king.

We can imagine the state of excitement into which the women's court of Shushan would be thrown when the inmates knew of Vashti's refusal. The one who was accounted their head, because most beautiful, to neglect or withstand a command of the king their master—unheard-of audacity! Many would doubtless deride her squeamishness. They wished that it had only been their good fortune to receive such an invitation. And when the determination of the king became known, doubtless many would rejoice, and, tossing their heads, say, "The conceited woman is rightly served." Such hoped, possibly through her fall, to find a way to rise to his majesty's favour.

Hard, indeed, she would find it, to bear the despite of her sister slaves. Overwhelming would seem the sudden rejection. How *unexpectedly* it came! That morning the sun of her prosperity rose bright in the heavens, but midday has not passed before her sky is darkened, and her sun has withdrawn itself. Henceforth she is left to wander in the courts of the woman as the rejected queen.

We cannot but remark upon the facility with which divorce took place in that land of Persia. *How easily could the stronger cast off the weak!* Unjust and disastrous such a law. We cannot be too thankful that we live not where such laws obtain. Nor can we too jealously guard the sacred obligations of the wedded life. All must see with

pain any increased carelessness about these obligations, and mark with sorrow the indications of domestic unhappiness revealed in divorce courts. Perhaps many cases of unhappiness might be traced to a similar cause to that which brought about the separation of Ahasuerus and Vashti. Any mere trifle becomes sufficient as an excuse for separation. We have heard of a quarrel and divorce taking place because one asserted that there were a certain number of windows in a house opposite, and the other denied it. Each maintained their point with obstinacy, and neglected to settle their difference by counting them. Indeed, such little things are the most fruitful cause of domestic unhappiness, leading on to the miserable exhibitions in public courts.

Many a poor sister of Vashti has, however, tasted Vashti's sorrow, owing to no fault in themselves. An indulgence in a like habit to that of Ahasuerus has led many to act with his foolishness, harshness, and injustice. Known only to themselves has been the dread of many a wife lest the knowledge of a husband's secret failing should get abroad. Known only to themselves the many shifts to make up for deficiencies for necessary household expenditure—deficiencies caused by a husband's extravagance and recklessness. Known only to themselves the number of weary hours during which they either sit watching or lie waking and waiting the return of their dissolute lord. Known only to themselves, also, the many insults, the ill-usage to which they are subject—ill-treatment, the result of inflamed passions and embittered spirits. God have mercy upon the thousands of sad women who know the truthfulness of that to which we refer! God have mercy, since men have so little!

The sneering utterance has sometimes been heard, that only women believe in Christianity. No wonder that the womanly heart turns to it for consolation, when there has been none found elsewhere. Far from thinking it a slight upon the Gospel, that more women believe than men, we think it a high testimony to its value. Women have recognised the power of Christ and His Gospel. He has enfranchised them. We see what He has effected in this respect when we contrast lands under His sway with those that have not generally accepted the Gospel. How great the honour in which women are now held in these lands! Compare it with the tolerance accorded,—for toleration is all they get,—in unchristianized lands. We see, in the Vashtis of Persia, the zenanas of India, the houris of Turkey, and the squaws of the red man, what would have been the position of women in Europe, but for the principles which are the outgrowth of the Gospel.

Solomon, affecting to despise woman, said, "A man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among ten thousand I have not found." This was an utterance in harmony with the spirit of his age and nation. It would not be in harmony with the spirit of this age or of Christian nations. To this day the wife of the Jew occupies not a position equal to the wives of Christendom. Go into many synagogues and notice high barriers of brass in the galleries, behind which only women are allowed to sit, and through the bars of which they are permitted to catch glimpses of their fathers, husbands, or brothers, arrayed in solemn *tolesch*, performing their devotions. In such a spot one realises the breadth and boldness of the Apostle's assertion, that "in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female." Husbands and wives are in Him made "heirs together of the grace of life." In the Gospel they stand on a ground of perfect equality. The wife is only the weaker vessel in the same sense that the ornamental vase is more delicate, fragile, and tender than the homely and clumsy vessel wrought from coarser clay.

How the Saviour honoured woman! What ready help He gave in all their troubles, and what unbounded confidence He received in return! It is most interesting to mark how He treated them. See the Canaanitish woman venturing to ask Him to come and restore her daughter, and He grants her request. See how the Samaritan woman at the well-side eagerly drinks in His utterances, and even forgets her errand in the absorbing character of His teachings. Behold Mary seated at His feet, forgetting her household cares, and how He forgives the forgetfulness. Notice Martha troubled about much serving, fretfully complaining of her burdens, and how He calms the fretfulness. Listen to His high encomium on another—"She hath done what she could." Harken to the praise unstintingly given to the widow who, loving her temple and God more than herself, cast in "all the living that she had." Remember also how thoughtful was Christ for the one who stood in the nearest earthly relationship to Himself—His mother. He stayed for a time the full accomplishment of His work and of the world's redemption, to attend the sorrow of her through whose soul the sword of anguish was even then

passing. Committing her into the hands of a loved disciple, He pronounced the words, "It is finished," and yielded His spirit into the hands of His Father.

Women also readily recognized His sympathy, and sought to repay in a measure His marked defence. They "ministered unto Him of their substance." They were among the last to leave the place of crucifixion, and the first to be at the tomb of His resurrection. The heart of woman has ever since been drawn to Christ. Had Vashti, the rejected queen, the divorced wife, the wronged woman, lived and known Him, she would doubtless have been among His followers. We detect in her that spirit which, although repudiating the commands of a Persian despot, would have recognized His claims. She lived up to the light she had; and certainly all that was modest, pure, courageous, and womanly in her, would be approved by Him. Divorced by man, she was certainly not disgraced before God.

Esther

BY REV. CHARLES R. BROWN.

"How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people?"—Esther viii. 6.

Your first impulse on reading the entire Book of Esther is to exclaim, Is this Saul also among the Prophets? It does not seem to breathe the native air of the religious man. It is sadly deficient even in the highest and best morality. The lack does not result merely from the fact that the name of the Deity is not used once in the whole Book. Not every book that saith Lord, Lord, enters into the kingdom of that which is profitable for doctrine, for reproof and for instruction in righteousness. But the whole spirit of the Book grates upon a Christian consciousness as being narrow, selfish and vindictive. It concedes so much to the hardness of men's hearts that it practically casts in its lot with their moral limitations and moves upon that lower level. It is the *one* Book in the Old Testament that makes no reference to the Holy Land—it does not even set foot upon that soil which, in the production of the choicest moral and religious truth, has proved to be the "good ground." It serves to give striking illustration of the fact that God has worked, not always as He would, but as He could, in view of the deficiencies of the human agencies employed.

One of the chief redeeming features of the Book is suggested in the text. It is worthy of remembrance that in the face of a frivolous and voluptuous court, where she had become the reigning favourite among the king's beauties, Esther could and did plead for her people. It shows that even in untoward surroundings, the Spirit of God is able to seek and to save something of that which was lost, for, in spite of the alluring temptations to be a Persian among the Persians, Esther cannot endure to see the evil that threatens her countrymen. At the risk of her position as favourite, and at the risk of her very life, she ventures to "go in unto the king, which is not according to the law," saying, with a touch of that Oriental fatalism which in later centuries has swept that whole region, "If I perish, I perish." As a loyal Hebrew she cannot endure the thought of the destruction of her kindred, and she comes "before the king and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews."

When God chose the Hebrew nation to be a special people unto Himself, the sense of their peculiar relation not only deepened their devotion to Jehovah, it strengthened the bond that knit them together as shareholders in a common life. The long providential training they received perpetuated and augmented this attachment. To this very day, that race loyalty has been an element of their strength and of their wisdom in the sight of the nations. Have you ever seen a Hebrew begging on the streets? Somehow their kinsmen according to the flesh do not allow even the incompetent to become public charges or to bring their needs in open appeal before the Gentiles. Have you ever studied the thoroughly organized system of hospitals, homes for the aged and other institutions established and maintained by Hebrews for Hebrews, in the large cities of our land? The Jew is said to be clever at driving a hard bargain with the uncircumcised, but when a needy Hebrew is to be considered, the old cry of Judah still comes to his lips, "He is our brother, our flesh." The unfortunate clannishness of the Jews may be in part an alloy forced into the purer composition of their patriotic love for one another by years of

persecution and ostracism. But wherever we find that care of the Jews for one another and whenever we hear a Hebrew cry that his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved, we realise that the spirit that spoke through Moses still bears fruit. If he once entreated mercy upon his people, saying, "Forgive their sin;—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book," benevolent and devoted Hebrews are still carrying on his work by praying for the peace of Jerusalem, and by showing kindness to their kinsmen according to the flesh. So the courage, the tears and the pleadings of Esther in this passage all bear their testimony to this same intense love of a Jew for his own countrymen.

There is no doubt but that, in the dark days the Hebrews have seen since the days of Esther, her conduct has been useful in strengthening the purpose and steadying the will of many a Hebrew in rendering devoted service to his fellows. Courage is contagious, and its germs will live like the grains of wheat found in the closed hand of the mummy, and will serve to inoculate the reader of this old document in a distant land and time. When you hear Esther say, "I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish," your thought runs forward to that Hebrew of the Hebrews who said, "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." You think even of the King of the Jews, Who "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," knowing full well the cup that He must drink. The most effective instruction that comes to us, in any of the qualities that go to make up noble character, is the instruction of a powerful example. One great element of value in the study of history arises from the fact that the various traits of righteous life become flesh and dwell among us in one or another of the actors that made the history. Joan of Arc was asked how she became such a successful leader; how she could exercise such sway and authority over the troops in time of unusual peril. Her simple reply was, "I tell my people to go in boldly against the English; and then I go in boldly myself." Likewise Esther's intense devotion to her own people in the midst of the allurements of a corrupt foreign court, will ever stand as a full-page illustration of that loyal patriotism which can as truly fill the heart of the woman who pleads and prays as of the man who votes and fights.

The passage is instructive also in the light it throws on the duties of privilege. There are two ways of using advantage, social position or popular favour. One is to abandon it as being a perilous possession. The right eye of a woman's beauty or the right hand of a man's ability may cause him to stumble. Rather than to fall into permanent sin through the misuse of such gifts, it is better to cut them off, and enter into life maimed. Better, but not the best! If the right eye and the right hand can be consecrated to holy service rather than destroyed, the man will reach his best by entering into life not maimed. The difficulty of managing large possessions, for example, in a Christian way, may truly be likened to the difficulty of passing a camel through the eye of a needle. But it would be a calamity if every rich man threw his gold in the bay or gave it all away, and refused thenceforward to use the splendid business abilities with which God has endowed him, in the Christian administration of wealth. There are conspicuous situations in which some men and women find themselves which it would be cowardly for them to abandon, with the thought that a retired and quiet life would prove easier. It is equally as wrong for the man who looks joyfully upon some opportunity that is worth five talents of silver, to neglect it or any portion of it, as it is for the man with the modest little opportunity only a fifth as large, to go and bury it in the earth. The failure to devote any of our abilities to God's service, or to use any situation where we find ourselves as vantage ground for usefulness, plunges us at once into the outer darkness of the unprofitable servants.

Esther was blessed in an unusual degree with personal charms. She "was fair and beautiful" and she "obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her." Even in that select and royal collection of beauties, she shone pre-eminent, "and the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti." But to her lasting credit, these advantages were not cherished merely for her own personal gratification on the one hand, nor on the other were they neglected or relinquished. When she learned through her compatriot Mordecai that the Jews were in danger of wholesale slaughter, she brought her beauty, her position as favourite, her carefully prepared banquets, and all her influence, before the king to plead

for her people. It was a hazardous undertaking for her to attempt to secure the revocation of that royal edict published when "letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old." To even come unbidden into the king's presence to prefer any sort of request was dangerous in the extreme. We have all read of the deadly ceremonialism of those Oriental courts, and of the reckless violence when petty customs were disregarded. Conventionality was precious and human life was cheap. It would have been easier and safer for Esther to have turned away from her position as favourite and have fled to some quiet spot where she might have rendered other humbler service to some of her kinsmen. But recognizing the debt of strength and the obligations of special privilege, she bravely resolves to use her advantages for the protection of her own people. She "had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people"; but to make her plea effective, she will confess her own Hebrew blood, and take her place among those who were under sentence of death. "If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed."

It suggests to us that there may be a worthy consecration of feminine beauty and of social skill to noble ends. The Bible habitually gives evidence of a wide hospitality as to the qualities that may be received into the household of faith. In its catalogues of moral heroes, we are sometimes startled at some of the extraordinary saints. In the roll-call of the Book of Hebrews, Rahab, Samson and Jephthah are invited to come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of faith. Perhaps there is need to-day that fuller recognition be given to the fact that all normal and essential elements in this human life of ours may have their place and consecration in that higher and enduring Kingdom of which there shall be no end. An attractive woman may consecrate her graces to the service of the Master and become, in the finest sense, a church belle to call others to the house of God. A man of social tact and skill may follow Christ and become, through his gracious hospitality, a fisher of men. There is nothing bright and winsome in everyday life that may not fill the house with a richer fragrance, when, like the broken box of alabaster, it is laid at the feet of our Lord.

The outcome of this Book teaches us also that both in the daily round of common tasks and in what seem like the unexpected chances that fall out, there is the purpose and providence of God at work. We find such a succession of happy circumstances in this Book of Esther that we often question whether we are treading on the firm ground of historical fact or moving with an imaginative and strongly patriotic writer through the pages of a national epic, where fact and fancy are intertwined. There is a neat exactness about the way in which some of the occurrences fit into each other that seems almost too good to be true outside of romantic novels or theatrical performances. If all the things narrated here were actual events, it surely is a bit of history that lends itself rarely well to dramatic purposes. The king, in a drunken revel, makes a coarse request and then quarrels with Vashti, his queen, in consequence of her refusal. Just at this opportune time, Esther, a handsome young Jewess, is brought into the palace, and by her charms wins the place of the favourite. Then Haman, the enemy of the Jews, succeeds in his wicked plot and obtains the issuance of a royal edict for their promiscuous slaughter. But, again in the nick of time, the king has a sleepless night and to while away the tedious hours has the books of the records of the chroniclers read before him. He learns that Mordecai the Jew has formerly given information of a plot against the king's life, and that no suitable honour or dignity has been conferred upon him in recognition of that distinguished service. At last, by a sort of poetic justice, the marks of royal favour that Haman had named as being appropriate for the man whom the king delighted to honour, thinking they were to be bestowed upon himself, are given to Mordecai; while Haman himself is hanged upon the very gallows that he had joyfully built to hang the Jew. The plain events of actual life do not always move in such a satisfactory way and the dénouement sometimes lags or is only half complete when it does arrive.

But even though the critics and students of Persian history may point out certain embellishments made by the fond writer of these chapters so dear to Hebrew pride, taking the story by and large it inculcates this true and useful lesson: We need not fret ourselves because of evil doers or because of those who for a time bring wicked devices to pass. Yet a little while and the wicked shall not be, the evil doers shall be cut off and those that wait upon the Lord shall inherit the land. Alike in ancient Persia and in this

land the principle hold true that the steps of good men are ordered by the Lord, and even though they fall they shall not be utterly cast down. And, while, in such passages as the speeches of Job's friends and in some other portions of the Old Testament, there appears a hasty insistence that men must get their deserts on this earth and an unworthy impatience to see visible demonstrations of the fact that sin is punished and righteousness rewarded, the general trend of this ancient philosophy of life is sound.

In the light of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, we have learned that the blessings upon godly obedience are not always paid in the coin of this realm; the accounts are not always settled by the last day of the following December; and there are many confusing problems left upon our hands, when we try to adjust the apparent deserts to the apparent rewards. But though the more precious results of righteous living consist in the sense of inward worth and peace; though the fuller entrance of the obedient into the joy of their Lord may be withheld until we have moved forward to another stage of our existence; and though we shall need to wait until the mists have cleared away to completely recognize that even-handed justice coupled with the tenderest mercy have controlled the issue, the substantial fulfilment of the gracious promises uttered by men of vision throughout all these periods of revelation will reward and vindicate our trust. In that far-away Persian court, the Lord saw the sorrow and peril of the people who had chosen Him as the portion of their inheritance, and in strange and devious ways He came down to deliver them. Esther could not endure to see the evil that threatened her kinsmen; and forsaking the pleasures of reigning as the unsuspected favourite for a season, she confessed her Hebrew blood and plead for her people at the peril of her life. And though the attachment of the Hebrews to Jehovah was often obscured by bitterness and cruelty, as seen in the last bloody pages of this Book, though the beauty of Esther's devotion to her fellow countrymen is marred by glaring defects in her life, yet the spirit of faith that was in the Jews is reckoned to them for righteousness. The coveted deliverance was granted, and "the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour." The anniversary of this successful pleading of Esther for her people became the feast of Purim; "therefore do the Jews . . . make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another."

Esther

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

"And so will I go in unto the king," etc.—Esther iv. 16.

Ahasuerus was the sovereign of a mighty empire, which stretched from the very borders of Europe half-way across Asia to the mountains which look down upon India. It passed away as all those mushroom empires of the East grew and crumbled and disappeared. There is nothing left of it now save perhaps that little kingdom of Persia, which acts as a buffer between Russian and British power. It was then the mightiest empire which the world had yet seen, and Ahasuerus was unlimited lord of all its people and possessions, grand enough in the worship which was rendered to him to be lord of all the earth.

In this vast empire, scattered here and there, were some two millions of Jews—orderly, law-abiding, sober, and useful citizens, but greatly disliked. It was just what we see to-day in nearly every land except our own and those of kindred speech. Jew-baiting has been going on from time immemorial, and still survives. They were hated in Persia, as they are in the world to-day; not because they were bad, troublesome people, but for fifty other reasons,—because they were a separate people, marrying none but their own kin; because in matters of faith and worship they stood apart from all; probably still more because they were bankers and money-lenders, and money-makers; keen, eager, and decidedly hard, and amassing wealth much faster than their neighbours. You can easily imagine it all, because it is still seen in Russia, France, and Germany to-day. They were everywhere spoken against and envied, and falsely accused of all manner of enormities; and there were outcries and riots and assaults and fierce complaints, until at last it all culminated in this. The cruellest Jew-baiter in the land got at the great king's ear, and persuaded him to settle the whole business at a stroke. Sign a decree to have all their heads cut off in one day—the whole two million men, women and children—no trouble at all! The repose of his august majesty should not be disturbed. Just a

stroke of the pen—and Haman would have his butchers ready and carry out all the details, and the land would be at peace.

The dreadful thing was done, the letter signed, and over those two unconscious millions the murderous knife hung, ready to descend when the fixed hour came. But that hour never came. For a higher power than Ahasuerus was watching over these doomed ones, and had chosen the instrument of their salvation. Not as a man would have chosen. No Joshua, Gideon, Wallace, or William Tell. No Deborah or Joan of Arc. No warrior in armour at all, but a feeble woman—nay, a mere slip of a girl in her teens—Esther the young Jewess.

She had been wedded to the king through no wish or choice of her own. She was only one among many wives, and women of the other sort; but he had set her first for the time, because she pleased his fickle fancy. Yet for thirty days he had not cared to see her, and it seemed just as likely as not that his passion had spent its novel force and that he was waiting to give his favour to another. The law forbade her under penalty of death to go into his presence unless expressly called. Women's rights had not much chance in those days. A wife, thank God, is somebody now—occasionally more than that, ruling her household and her husband in the fear of God and otherwise—but then she was a mere slave, a chattel, a dog licking its master's feet—and she must not speak to that mighty lord of hers under penalty of death.

And now there was laid upon her pitiful heart this burden of sorrow and duty. She was asked to go in and plead with the king for those millions of her kinspeople. She was asked to go in and tell him what he did not yet know, that she herself was one of the despised and hated race. She was asked to brave his possible anger, his almost certain displeasure—to incur the risk of disgrace—and not, improbably, of a sharp and cruel death. No one else could do it. On her decision hung the fate of those two millions. It was but a forlorn hope, the chances were that she would fail and fall with the rest of them. But no matter! There are things dearer than life. She would rather venture all, and, failing, die, than leave those people to perish and live on. "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

And now why have I repeated to you this story with so many of its details, a story which every one of you knows so well? Just to remind you that acts of grandest heroism and self-sacrifice can be done in every sphere and relationship of life, and that the valour of the veteran soldier may be exceeded by the quieter daring and fearlessness of some timid woman or gentle maiden. These Old Testament pages contain many a thrilling story of men who had almost a contempt of death when it stood in the way of duty; men who fought battles against terrible odds; men who went through the fiery furnace, or faced the lion's den, rather than be false to their convictions and traitors to their God. But the bravest of them all did no nobler deed than this girl-woman when she staked all that she had, all the delights of life—her queenly splendour, and life itself, on this simple venture of faith and duty. The world has always made much of the soldier's courage, and it always will, until wars and fightings are no more. In vain do you say that the soldier's trade is an ill one, and that fighting of all sorts is a barbarous custom which ought to have no place in the Christian dispensation. That may be so. But in spite of all, you say men will continue to honour the man who ventures life and goes grandly into the face of death in obedience to orders, and for the sake of something which he deems greater than himself. Where we err, if we err at all, is not thinking enough of the fearlessness which is shown in other than red battlefields, and in not remembering that there is no place or position in life in which a man or woman may not occasionally find an opportunity of being a hero, and of doing things which are worthy to be told in song. Brave deeds are done around us every day, by great people and small people alike, by all sorts and conditions, just because it is their duty. Sovereigns are always more or less at the mercy of madmen and others. Our honoured King and Queen do a courageous thing every time they are driven out or appear in public, for there is often but a step betwixt them and death. And the poor needlewoman does a braver thing when she toils all day and half through the night to get bread for her children, fighting with grim starvation, and too independent to ask for help, or complain. You cannot walk through our public streets many times without witnessing things that send a thrill of admiration through you. A short time ago I saw a police constable run right in front of a runaway horse, with a ponderous van behind it, seize the reins, and bring the frightened beast to a stop. Many a one has gained the Victoria

cross or a marble statue for a deed no nobler than that. You can hardly take up a single morning newspaper but you find, side by side with records of crime and infamy, stories which are fit to be printed in gold, of fearless self-sacrifice done by everyday sort of people. Most of us read with something very much like tears in our eyes, about notable and heroic shipwrecks; but not with tears alone. It sets our hearts beating with thankfulness to read of so many men and women who know how to die. These things are sad enough, but they are beautiful also. When captain, officers, crew and others, vie with each other in calmness, self-control, and steady obedience to orders—no panic rush of cowardly and selfish feet. Husbands giving their lives for wives; parents for children; wives beseeching that they may die with their husbands, parting with their life-belts to save others; women half immersed in water-logged boats singing cheering hymns, and bidding each other be brave through all the long horrible hours. No story of battle that has ever been told is more inspiring than these stories. They make us proud of our nation and of humanity. So long as the British people, or any people, can act, and suffer, and die like that, we need have no fear of the nation's future.

But not there alone! no, rather everywhere, if you look around on sea and land, you may find examples of the same spirit: the gentle woman who goes fearlessly into city slums and haunts of criminals on her mission of mercy; the doctor pursuing his round, day by day, through fever-stricken houses; the business man refusing to do a crooked thing, though his refusal involves him in daily loss; the young man or girl beset by evil companions or work-people, and holding on to faith and prayer through all ridicule; the man or woman worn weary and full of heartache, because of the crosses of life, yet putting on a cheerful face and speaking bright words to those about them; the wife shielding a cruel, heartless, perhaps drunken, husband, and clinging to him with loving fidelity to the last. These all are God's martyrs—heroes of duty, and the sun shines down on no grander scenes.

In every condition of life, then, there is room for the exhibition of the Christlike virtue. You, my brothers and sisters, need not look afar for distant battlefields. There is one in your own life, and in your own heart. There are victories to be won there which can only be won by enduring hardship and despising loss. If a young man undertakes to conquer himself, to conquer his passion, his indolence, his excessive love of pleasure, his fleshly appetites, and keep himself from being seduced and enslaved by the immoral influences about him, he must indeed be strong, watchful, determined, prayerful. Like Cromwell's soldiers, he must trust in God and keep his powder dry. And the temptations of later years call for just the same iron qualities of resisting. That man in the shop and warehouse and commercial rooms, who speaks the truth, acts justly and declines to do even a shady thing, is a brave man—none braver; he is the sort of man who would lead a forlorn hope, or die at the martyr's stake, if it should be required of him. And real heroism is needed too, in all the humble walks where men and women have to carry their obscure burdens and labour under their secret crosses. How can one better play the man, or show the divine strength that is in a woman, than by suffering trials with quiet resignation? The courage which holds up amid the common worries of life, and is always saying to itself, *Cheer up*, is the most needed, and sometimes the best of all.

The religious life is throughout the life of brave men, if it is at all earnestly religious. It can only be fought well by what the Apostle calls good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Think of those who hold their faith in all sorts of companies and societies, who are not to be laughed out of it, or driven out of it; who never show themselves ashamed of it, who are not afraid to speak of it when there is a seasonable opportunity. The courage of these men and women is of the rarest and most precious kind. God never forgets to write it in the Book of Life.

We all need the spirit of Esther, then—nay, let us rather say, the Spirit of our Divine Master, if we are to play the part of men, and especially of Christian men. What she did was to set duty first; to put the work which God had given her to do before all things else; to offer her very life if she could not save her life without sacrificing higher obligations. That is what we are asked to do many a time, and in the strength of God we can do it. "So will I go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish." But she did not perish. A mightier power than the king's takes care of those who thus do His will.

Esther

BY REV. GEORGE W. NICHOLS, D.D.

"So will I go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish."—Esther iv. 16.

"So will I go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish." These were indeed noble words uttered by a noble woman. The unflinching bravery, the moral courage, the pure benevolence, which shone so conspicuously in the life and deeds of Esther, have given her as imperishable record in the annals of history.

Who then was Esther? She was a daughter of Abiel of the tribe of Benjamin, a beautiful and devoted Jewess, born about 500 years before Christ. She was left an orphan at an early age and her subsequent care and education were entrusted to her cousin Mordecai, one of those taken captive at the destruction of Jerusalem; here in that captivity she lived quietly with her kinsman Mordecai and many of her loved people. Ahasuerus was now the king of Persia. His dominion embraced no less than 127 provinces, extending from Ethiopia to India, and his position was therefore one of unrivalled splendour. In order to display his great wealth and power, and magnify his prosperous administration, he makes a magnificent festival and invites the people of his realm to a feast which should continue seven days.

This entertainment was held in the court of the king's palace, which is described as magnificent, with its rich ornaments, gorgeous drapery, and marble floors and pillars. The Queen had likewise a private pavilion for her guests. Ahasuerus however, is not satisfied with this, but sends a peremptory message for Vashti to appear in her jewelled robes and diadem, to grace the public feast. She refuses to accept the invitation of the monarch, and on consultation with his courtiers, the king divorces her. Search is then made throughout Persia for all the most beautiful women to assemble in order that a choice may be made of one who should become the wife of the king. Among the company which moved slowly and timidly into the audience chamber of king Ahasuerus was Esther the Jewess. She was, as we have already said, a woman of rare beauty, of exquisite form and faultless features, but more than this, her character was as beautiful, noble, and lovely as her person, well calculated to win the highest admiration and esteem of all. You may search the historic page in vain to find a woman of more integrity and moral heroism. She knew already that a cruel edict had gone forth from the king, who had been instigated by Haman his prime Minister, that all the captive Jews throughout the realm should be slain; she knew that this same Haman had plotted against the lives of her countrymen as well as against the life of her dearly loved cousin Mordecai; she knew that he in rent garments and sackcloth travelled the city with a loud and bitter cry which rang over the walls of the palace in tones which startled the slumbering inmates. Could she look on and witness the awful massacre of her countrymen and make no effort for their rescue? Could she in the loving tenderness of her heart forget those poor oppressed exiles, their bondage and their chains? Never! It could not be! What can she do? What shall she do? We will see presently what this noble woman did do. It was an unalterable law of the kingdom, that whoever should enter into the king's presence unbidden should die, unless the king chose to hold out the golden sceptre. And it is from this moment that the character of Esther as a moral heroine and martyr begins to reveal itself. Can it be that she will dare to brave that cruel edict? Will she dare to stand over the grave's mouth risking her own life to save her countrymen? One is reminded of the dark days in our own revolutionary history, the winter of 1777-8, when our patriot soldiers had little food and clothing, when barefooted they left their bloody tracks on the frozen ground, and slept on the bare earth, without food and sufficient clothing, and when Washington seeing the suffering soldiers and witnessing how the fires of patriotism burned brightly in their hearts commended their cause to God in prayer at Valley Forge, kneeling on the ground while his cheeks were wet with tears. Esther's mind rose up to the height of heroism and devotion for her suffering people. She sent this word to her cousin: "Go gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days night or day. I also, and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish." Her royal apparel was laid aside, and with an anxious trembling heart and strict fasting she made preparations for that inter-

view. The three days fast at an end, watch her as she approaches the palace with its rich canopy and curtains, its tall columns and marble floors. Arrayed in her rich robes, and with sparkling gems, she draws near the audience chamber of one of the proudest, most lordly of sovereigns. It was a moment of indescribable anxiety, a spectacle that none can view without awe and astonishment, she stops for a moment and pauses on the threshold as if to overcome the choking sensation that well nigh suffocates her and takes away her breath and then she passes slowly into the room while her maidens stand without in hushed suspense, waiting to witness the result.

The spectacle was enough to move any heart. As Esther stood there before him with pale, but beautiful countenance, with trembling look, her whole aspect so good, so brave, so noble, the king was utterly captivated and overpowered. Should she die? No! immediately the golden sceptre rises as a token of his favour. From that time Esther is elevated from her former humble, lonely position to a height of grandeur and influence, such as became the queen of the mightiest monarch. Such was her power and influence over king Ahasuerus that he said to her: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther, and what is thy request? it shall be given thee, to the half of the kingdom." For her he revolutionized the kingdom, discarding Haman the Prime Minister, who had plotted the death of Mordecai and the death of the Jews, and elevating Mordecai to his place, and bestowing many favours upon the oppressed Jews. None ever filled a high position with more dignity and genuine worth than did she. She was the same noble woman moving around with gentle mien and lovely manner among the nobles and dignitaries of the Court, as when she graced the lowly habitation of her cousin. She was brave, ready to do and die for others. I know of no other character more lovely or more worthy, in ancient or modern history. And now having finished the exceedingly interesting narrative of Esther's history, let me call your attention to one or two most important and practical moral lessons which these words of Esther are calculated to teach us.

They teach us, first, the necessity of decision and prompt moral determination. Queen Esther presents a most notable and remarkable instance of these virtues. She was placed in peculiar circumstances, was called to act in a most trying emergency. Here was a grand opportunity of doing good. Esther felt that she had a pressing duty to perform to herself and her beloved people and she was prepared unhesitatingly.. "I will go." These words express decision, moral determination. I am resolved to discharge this imperative duty, even though I may perish in the attempt. Such were her sublime, heroic words. "I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish." Many and many a one placed in like circumstances would have hesitated and stood appalled in that critical moment, their minds and hearts filled with sadness as they looked back over the past or as they cast their thoughts forward to the dark and shadowy future. The man who vacillates and hovers between inclination and duty, who distrusts his own power to carry out his noble resolves, such a man will give up in despair and fail. We need to have the promptness and decision which characterised this heroic woman, which has caused her name to become a familiar household word upon everyone's lips, and shows us what poor, weak humanity is capable of. The shrinking, undecided, wavering state of mind, which stands hesitating when the occasion demands prompt action, will never be crowned with success, never win a Heavenly crown.

Napoleon never lost a battle. Why? Because he was prompt to decide, quick as lightning to strike. Because he never spent a moment's time in delay or conjecture. Alexander the Great, when asked how he conquered the world gave this remarkable reply: "By not delaying."

Among the letters that came home from the Crimean War, I think one of the most beautiful and touching of them all was that of a little drummer boy to his mother. After describing the terrible hardships, the hunger and thirst, the bitter cold and fierce winds, which the army endured throughout that winter's memorable campaign, he concludes with this simple, touching language: "But, mother, it is our duty, and for our duty we will die!"

Thus, then, let me take occasion to press upon you the necessity of quick resolve in reference to matters which concern your eternal salvation. Remember that we are fallen, undone, perishing sinners. But Christ has suffered and died to redeem us from eternal death. Remember that these precious hours, and days and years of probation are given us in which to decide our future destiny and mould our characters for Heaven, and secure, through God's forgiveness, and Christ's death, a seat at God's right hand and

an entrance into yon golden palace in the skies. Esther decided her destiny and gained a throne. She rose from a humble Jewish captive to share the high honours of a royal palace. She was elevated from poverty to princely greatness and wealth. Have you been as decided, as prompt, in matters which appertain to the well being of your soul, as she? Have you exhibited as bold a determination to win the favour of your immortal King, as was she to gain the favour of an earthly one?

But, secondly, we may learn also from the narrative, the lesson of self sacrifice. What a noble example of self sacrifice was that of Esther. She was willing to stand as it were, over the mouth of the grave, to risk her own life in order to save the lives of her countrymen. Such examples are rare. Few are willing to die for others. To Esther, in her young life and blooming beauty, life was as sweet and desirable as it is to any one of us, but, yet, she was willing to resign that life in a good cause, nobly resolved to face the king's edict. So when Luther was summoned to appear before the Diet at Worms, his friends, apprehending danger, sought to dissuade him from what they considered a rash attempt. But Luther said: "I am determined to go in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, though as many devils should oppose me, as there are tiles upon all the houses in Worms." It is this spirit of self sacrifice, denial of self and devotion to the good of others, which lies at the bottom of all noble deeds and grand achievements. Selfishness forms no part of the religion of Jesus Christ. What does God's Word teach us? Listen, "bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." "Be ye all of one mind having compassion one of another. Whosoever hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him." I commend to your practice the noble example and deed of Esther. Learn from it the great duty of an immortal being, to shape your life for the great end for which it was given, to glorify God and do good to your fellow-men. Deny yourselves. Take up your cross and follow Christ. Remember, no man liveth to himself, and whosoever in a spirit of self sacrifice tries to benefit and save the souls of others, will reap a rich reward.

Haman

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"Yet all this availeth me nothing," etc.—Esther v. 13.

One man alone was instrumental in placing the Jews in danger of complete extermination. This happened during the period of their captivity. To supply the record of their wondrous deliverance the Book of Esther primarily was written. The man who wrought this danger was Haman, the Grand Vizier to the King of Persia. He was a native of Persia, but an Agagite who, like Joseph in Egypt, had risen spite of alien descent, to the foremost position of power. He was an astute politician, and apparently as unscrupulous as he was cunning and clever.

The king heaped upon his favourite riches in abundance. He would have Haman's means adequate to his position. Many houses and much land, confiscated often on the slightest excuse, were handed over to him. The post of Grand Vizier would afford ample opportunities of self-enrichment. We read of the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh against the king, and of its discovery. To whom would fall the large possessions of these hitherto influential men? What more probable than that the next favourite should receive a great share of their forfeited property?

It was to the material rewards of office that such an one as Haman would have a hungry eye. He well understood the ways of court, so as to secure the best tangible results of favouritism. Obtaining these, he then aimed at something higher. His conceptions of higher honour expand in proportion to his elevation. At length a thought enters his mind, to which if he should give utterance, immediate deposition and death would ensue. This thought will leak out by-and-by. It only needs a fitting opportunity. Nay, it will seize and make an opportunity out of the flimsiest pretext.

Meanwhile Haman is as contented as an ambitious man ever can be. Under an outward calm he is hiding a flame of impatient expectancy. See him going forth from Shushan the palace. The gates are scarcely high enough for that proud-hearted man

on richly caparisoned horse. Mark that smile on his countenance. Haman is "exceedingly glad of heart." Some further honour has been put upon him, and he goes to his house to reveal it to his friends. Why may not a man of his calibre be proud? Can his honour ever be eclipsed? Can his glory ever be overshadowed? Can his name, handed down by his many children, ever die? Seeing that he knows so well the arts of courtiers and exercises his office only with respect to the pleasure of the king, who can supplant him in the king's favour? Do not all the rest of the courtiers and place-seekers look to him? Is not his favour in turn the sun that "gilds the noble troops waiting upon his smile"? "If ever man may flatter himself in the greatness and security of his glory," thinks Haman, "surely I may do so." "His weak head is turned by his cupful of honour." Ah, Haman! thy pride is dangerous; it is like high-heeled shoes, fitting thee only for a fall. Be careful, the least stone may cause thee to stumble. Be not over sure of thy position. Pitfalls are around. Thy ambition and pride are like heavy canvas on a ship, and need much ballast. Great is thy risk. Thou standest on the narrow apex of a mountain from which one false step will set thee rolling to the very abyss.

How many look with envy upon him as he rides forth! His servants hasten on before him, crying, "Bow the knee, bow the knee." Grateful to him is the reverence he receives. He cares not that it is reverence lacking respect, so long as there is outward obeisance. Such an one is sure to notice the least slight on the part of any who conforms not to the general rule, and his temper will not endure to see one erect head among many bowed backs.

One day Haman, as he rides forth, cannot help seeing that there is one who drops not to the ground as the rest before him. He pretends not to see, but with difficulty remains from commanding his attendants to inflict summary vengeance on the offender. Not only did Mordecai thus treat Haman once, but several times. The king's officers and Haman's servants reprove him for neglected duty. "What, Mordecai, dost thou not know that Haman is to be revered?"* Growls Mordecai, "Perhaps by you, not by me."

Now, if Mordecai refused honour to whom honour was due, he was wrong. None may practise incivility. Religion teaches us that we should "be courteous." But in Mordecai's case his religion disallowed this bowing, since his race had made a covenant with God to maintain perpetual hostility with the descendants of Amalek. "The cup of their iniquity had long been full," and Israel had not yet been instrumental in punishing their folly. Haman, descended from Agag, is in the royal line, and so a sort of representative of the condemned race. How shall Mordecai bend to him who is under God's curse, and appear to regard with honour one whom God disallows? Plead as might his friends or the servants of the king, it is useless; they do but "beat upon cold iron."

Haman understands the refusal. Indeed, he felt the same dislike towards the Jew that the Jew felt towards himself. Neither the one nor the other cares to hide their mutual hate. Haman writhes under the obstinate despite of this one man. His soul boils over with rage. With eyes aglare he hisses in venomous tones, "Ah, he shall rue his rudeness and bite the dust who would not bend his body. Revenge! Revenge I will have, not only on him, but on the whole hated race, from one end of Persia to the other! All my glory availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate."

After all, what a trifle it was that vexed the mind of this prosperous prince! It was the one drop of poison in the cup of his joy. It was the hidden ulcer inflicting frightful pain to the man who was doing his best to maintain a calm countenance. It was the black cloud glooming the sunshine of his prosperity. Although he has attained an elevation that may at one time have seemed far beyond his reach, he finds that thorns bestrew his path, and even leave their sharp points on his pillow. The thorn that rankles most severely is this, that Mordecai who sits in the king's gate will not bend to him. How pitiable is such pride, how contemptible such miserable whining! "All this availeth me nothing, so long as Mordecai the Jew sitteth in the king's gate."

Who that looked upon Haman as he rode forth in all the glory of purple and gold, or as he lounged on his divan in the midst of his friends, would have supposed that he had anything to cause him so much annoyance? And yet is it not always so? There is a skeleton in every house, the worm in every rose, sorrow in every heart.

Look into that stately mansion. See how richly it is furnished with finely carved chairs, luxurious lounges, marble-topped tables, and bookcases with rows of costly books. Pictures of the choicest character deck the walls. Busts and antiques are here and there. The velvety carpets feel like a mossy bank beneath the feet. Ask the occupants of the mansion if they are content, and perhaps the owner will tell you, "All this availeth me nothing so long as my neighbour on the hill has a house larger and better furnished." The wife will perhaps tell you that "all availeth nothing so long as a certain family is accounted as higher in the social scale than hers; or so long as at a dinner party some one had taken precedence of herself; or that she had not been invited to some great gathering where certain of the *élite* were expected." The real or supposed vexations of the weak-minded and exclusive are more than equal to those of the excluded. Petty social fanciful annoyances oft make all comforts and possessions to "avail nothing" in the production of real happiness.

Enter the shop of that tradesman. What a swarm of employés he has! What a large business he carries on! Yet he in his soul is not happy! He is envious. He will confess to himself if not to you, "All this availeth me nothing" so long as a certain competitor in the same business can buy cheaper or make money more rapidly than myself.

Go along a country road, and note some pretty homestead nestling among the trees; surely that must be the abode of content and peace! You approach it, and meeting the occupant thereof, you congratulate him on the beauty of his dwelling-place and charm of the surrounding hills; he, haggard and worn, only replies, "All this availeth me nothing. Look at my neighbour's barn, how much larger, and his crops, how much finer than mine!"

So the warrior or statesman, the preacher and the potentate are alike discontented. Dissatisfied, successful men. The blessings and privileges they possess are nothing; the trifling lack or annoyance is everything. Their state is as sinful as it is miserable. They are lineal descendants of Haman the Agagite.

It is not in the nature of worldly possessions or position to give full satisfaction. If they could, the results would have been injurious to man's moral nature. No thoughts of higher things entering man's mind, he would soon have been degraded to the level of the brute creation.

A certain amount of pleasure arises from the attainment of some possession or object, but not full satisfaction. It is pleasant to have wealth wherewith to gratify one's desires, to have a good, well-appointed house, to be held in honour, to be able to confer benefits and patronage on others; but if we make these things the one great aim in life, we are sure to reap much less of joy than we imagined. The drawbacks and counterbalancings are great. Much wealth, much furniture, many servants, a large house, and great popularity, are only extra anxieties. The pleasure soon palls. Like Haman, we soon say, "All this availeth me nothing."

Still, as a man without any passion is simply "a speaking stone," so if without some aim. Yet, as a horse too restive and fiery puts his rider in danger, so do our passions. Ambition in moderation is a good thing, and few men make anything who have none; but if we give the reins to our ambition we may be sure that such a fiery charger will dash away over rocks or near rivers to our great hazard.

A man when at sea cares neither for calm nor for a hurricane, but he enjoys a stiff breeze which helps the vessel along and braces his nerves at the same time. We suggest, therefore, not the banishment of all ambition, but its moderation; not a despal of all possessions, but that we should not be disappointed if we do not receive so much joy therefrom as we expected. Nay, we may thank our God that we cannot live on stones nor satisfy our hunger with husks, nor even live by bread alone. We may thank Him if in us has been cultivated the longing for those things which really afford satisfaction, such as righteousness, faith, love.

It is probable that Haman foresaw in Mordecai a possible rival. He knew that Mordecai was uncle to the queen. This gave him some influence. He had a good friend at court. Indeed, Haman had never been over-pleased at the selection made by the king of Esther the Jewess. Haman may have fancied that Mordecai presumed on this relationship to shield himself from any ill consequences of his obstinacy.

We are inclined to think that the reason wherefore Haman said, "All this availeth me nothing," was also because he *feared* Mordecai. He knew him to be a man of integrity, a man not to be bought. Haman was the slave of bad and selfish principles.

He was cruel withal. He cared not upon whom he trampled, provided he could ride on prosperously. We think it was a bold thing for a man to suggest to a king that a subject and a servant should put on the royal robes, ride the king's own charger, and don the king's own crown. Did Haman desire to accustom the people of the city to a sight of himself as the actual king? Was his hope this, that the people would cry, "Long live King Haman; down with Ahasuerus," a cry of which he would not have been slow to take advantage? He could not have wished to wear those royal robes for one day only, but for life.

We strongly suspect that Haman had been mixed up in the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh. Perhaps he proved traitor to them that he might more surely attain his end another way. The remark in the sacred narrative concerning the speedy advance of Haman after their deposition leads to this surmise. His aim is not abandoned though the others missed it. He works only in a more cautious and subtle way. He intends so to get rid of the king that he shall feel it an honour to be bowed out of his palace. This may have been the scheme. But Mordecai "sitteth at the king's gate." He is a man of integrity. Schemers and plotters always hate such men. No wonder that Haman hated Mordecai, for when the former thinks he is on the point of prospering, the hand of the latter is quietly lifted to stay his course. Haman is blowing so strongly to inflate the bubble of his pride that it is near to the bursting. He is twisting a rope which shall be a strong halter around his own neck. He is rearing a gallows for his enemy which will be a gibbet of eternal shame for himself. Mordecai becomes a sort of fate to Haman. We know that the Agagite was hoisted with his own petard.

We see that religion alone can give true content, and that possession or position can do nothing to soften the agony of the dying hour. "These are the things," said Johnson to Garrick, "that make a death bed terrible." All the joys, honours, comforts of the world are after all only "as a lamp that goeth out, leaving a disagreeable smell; whereas the peace which flows from an eternal God is like the sun which shineth more and more to the perfect day." To prefer the world to spiritual delights, is to act according to the folly of one who, being heir to a kingdom, should yet prefer some map or model to the kingdom itself. How easily might the map be torn, or the model be broken! The possession of the Kingdom of Heaven in the heart can never be destroyed. Those who possess it will not make Haman's confession theirs, "All this availeth me nothing." They will say rather, "Seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven, and its righteousness: all other things are added thereunto."

Haman

BY REV. GEORGE CRON.

"Yet all this availeth me nothing," etc.—Esther v. 13.

It is recorded of "the man Mordecai," that after his investment by Ahasuerus, who is supposed to have been Xerxes, a king of Persia, and the invader of Greece, with the power possessed by Haman at the time of his sudden fall, he "waxed greater and greater." It is difficult to see how this could have been affirmed of Ahasuerus, his master. He comes before us in the Book of Esther, seated on the very top and pinnacle of human greatness. If he was not satisfied with his position and his circumstances, he must have been a person of boundless ambition. At this distant date it almost takes one's breath away to read about the extent of his kingdom, the number and grandeur of his palaces, the splendour of his gardens, the select character of his harem, the abundance of his wealth, and the magnificence of his court. We are told that Ahasuerus reigned from India unto Ethiopia, and that his kingdom comprised 127 provinces. He was thus monarch of a little world, and his court was worthy of the mighty kingdom of which he was the head. That he was not competent personally to the management of the affairs of so vast a kingdom, and embracing such a variety of interests, hardly needs to be stated. He could not be in every place, and he could not superintend everything himself. Had he made the attempt, he would have speedily discovered that he had taken infinitely too heavy a task upon him. His strength was limited like that of other men; and he shared in those necessities which press us in common. He could not,

any more than the meanest of his subjects, dispense with food, recreation, and rest. If petty kings must have numerous officers of state, and servants of various kinds, what a retinue of servants a king like Ahasuerus would need! Each of the 127 provinces would require a governor who would be responsible to the king; and each governor would find it necessary to associate others with him in order that the work devolving on him might be properly done. The government of human beings necessarily involves an immense amount of labour and expense, and calls for constant vigilance on the part of those whom it concerns from the highest to the lowest; and when in the world's history was it ever otherwise? Now Haman was the favourite courtier of the Persian King Ahasuerus, at the period that Mordecai had the privilege of sitting at the king's gate. Once admitted to court, he rose in the king's estimation till he was appointed chief minister. We are distinctly informed by the author of the Book of Esther that Ahasuerus thought fit, early in his reign, to "advance Haman, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him." There was not one of all those who waited on him in Shushan the palace, in whom he reposed so much confidence, on whom he lavished so much honour, and to whom he committed so much power as Haman. Haman had privileges peculiar to himself; and he was not ignorant that he had more of the royal favour than any of the king's attendants; for, when the question was put to him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" he answered it under the impression that the man meant was himself: albeit, in this he was mistaken. Haman stood next to the king, was on terms of familiarity with him, and had extraordinary influence with him. He appears to have persuaded himself that there was scarcely a kindness which he could not obtain, and to have confidently calculated on the happy condition of things existing betwixt him and Ahasuerus continuing undisturbed. The handing to him on a certain occasion of the king's own signet-ring, shows conclusively that Haman had somehow contrived thoroughly to ingratiate himself with the potent ruler of 127 provinces; and, standing so high with Ahasuerus, it is what we might expect that the king's servants as a body would manifest a readiness to do Haman humble reverence. They would naturally study how to please him, knowing that he had but to speak against them, when closeted with the king, to secure their dismissal and degradation, and, it may be, their banishment or death. There was one, however, of the king's servants who formed the resolution, when Haman's promotion took place, that, happen what might, he would not pay him the respect which he was sure to claim, for which he was sure to look, and which his fellow-servants would all be sure to exhibit. This servant's name was Mordecai. He was a Jew. We have his pedigree in verse 5 of the 2nd chapter. He was "the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite"; and, in verse 6, his presence in the Persian dominions is satisfactorily accounted for. It seems that he was one of those who "were carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) King of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon had carried away." He was, therefore, a subject and servant of Ahasuerus against his will; and this may be the best place to state that he had acted the part of a father to Queen Esther, whose Jewish name was Hadassah. The reason for this was that in childhood she had been left an orphan. Death had deprived her of both father and mother; but, fortunately for her, she found a tender and attached protector and friend in Mordecai.

What led Mordecai to form a resolution to withhold from Haman the customary tokens of Oriental submission and respect, is a point on which no light is cast in the fascinating narrative. It may have been due to independence of spirit, although the name Mordecai means either "a little man" or "a worshipper of Mars"; but it is more probable that it was due to the fact that Haman was an Amalekite. At all events, he is represented as "the son of Hammedatha the Agagite." Now Agag was a kind of title of the kings of the Amalekites; and it is not unlikely that Haman was descended from the royal family of that nation. If we assume that he was, we can the better explain his connection with the court of Ahasuerus.

It may be asked—What was there in the circumstance that Haman was an Amalekite to cause Mordecai to determine that he would neither bow to him nor reverence him, his premiership notwithstanding? I answer simply this—the Amalekites were the ancient and bitter enemies of the Jews. Of course, the knowledge that they were would indispose Mordecai the Jew to yield Haman that measure of respect which the king had ordered to be paid to him as he went in and out of the palace. Whatever might be the reason, personal or national, it is clear that Mordecai's mind was made up not

to do Haman the reverence which the king's other servants were in the habit of according. His fellow-servants reminded Mordecai, when they saw that his want of reverence towards Haman was intentional, that it was the king's pleasure that marked honour should be given to his chief minister; but their interference produced no change. He persisted in the course which he had decided to adopt relative to Haman the Amalekite; and this is the more surprising that he could not be blind to the risk which in consequence he ran.

Had Haman not been the proud, jealous-minded, cruel, vindictive, wicked man that he was, he might have passed over in dignified silence the want of respect towards himself shown by Mordecai. As it was, he noticed it, and became the longer the more annoyed at it. Had only himself and Mordecai known about the matter, Haman would have been the abler to bear it. It was the more provoking and vexatious that the other servants were cognizant of the insulting treatment which he was receiving at the hands of Mordecai, and that he did not know what effect the bold, bad example which he was publicly setting would have upon them. Mordecai's conduct may have alarmed as well as offended him. It would be the surer to engender mental disquietude if he was aware of the relation subsisting between Mordecai and Esther; but Haman was careful not to act precipitately against Mordecai. He was evidently a man of considerable self-control. He judged it wiser not to lodge a complaint against Mordecai with the king. Perhaps he did not like to inform Ahasuerus that there was any one at court unfriendly towards him. Perhaps he was so certain that he could punish Mordecai when it suited him, that he did not see any necessity for calling in the aid of the king, or troubling him with the affair. If he was convinced in his own mind that he had Mordecai in his power, it would be the easier for him to restrain himself until the opportunity for revenging himself arose.

That Mordecai's refusal to bow himself in Eastern fashion before Haman was most offensive to the latter, there can be no doubt. He might seem to take it calmly, but, in reality, he did not. He brooded over it, and, the more he reflected upon it, the fiercer grew his hatred of him. He even hated Mordecai's people on account of it, and plotted their extermination, as if nothing less would satiate the spirit of revenge which was rapidly developing within his heart. Mordecai's behaviour so affected Haman that he could not hold his tongue about it when with his friends. To them he acknowledged that it poisoned all the advantages which he enjoyed. It was in the hearing, not of strangers, but of friends, that he said—"*Yet all this availeth me nothing,*" &c. Truth, like murder, will out. I can imagine Haman pretending, when he was in no mood to unbosom himself, that he attached no importance to Mordecai's manner towards him; but it was all a pretence. He did not hesitate to confess, when it could be safely done, that it was *the* bitter drop in his cup—so bitter that it imparted its bitterness to the entire contents of the cup. His wife, his sons, and more intimate friends all knew how hostile were his feelings towards Mordecai, and how glad he would be to see Mordecai's place in the king's gate empty, or filled by another.

It strikes me that there is in the text an *element of exaggeration*. Haman's worldly honour and prosperity did avail him, and to a greater extent than he supposed. Had all that was comfortable in his lot vanished, he would have been conscious of a tremendous difference; and it is doubtful if, to be revenged on Mordecai, he would have sacrificed place, power, and riches. A large sum he was prepared to pay to be well rid of Mordecai, for he offered the king "10,000 talents of silver" for a decree commanding the extermination of the Jews scattered throughout his kingdom; but that was all. He merely allowed the conduct of Mordecai so to influence his mind that he did not duly appreciate the many good things which he could call his own.

"All this" does not mean much in some cases? We bring nothing into the world with us. This is true of us all; and millions live all their days on the edge of nothing. It takes all they can earn to provide the barest necessities. It is no wonder that when they leave the world they take nothing with them, for they have nothing to take. The disciples took credit to themselves for having left all to follow Christ; but their all was very little indeed. In Haman's case "All this" meant a great deal. He had all that his heart could wish, so far as things secular were concerned. Ahasuerus had raised him to a level with himself, or, at least, within an inch of himself. The king made a sort of companion of him, and had intimated that it was his will that his servants generally should show him the profoundest respect. He had more money than he knew what to do with; and apparently he was so high in favour with Esther,

the queen, that she did not deem him unworthy to sit at the same banquet with herself and the king. What more could he desire? He had a wife who devoted herself to pleasing him; he had a houseful of children, and troops of friends; so that he was a singularly privileged mortal; but, himself being witness, his blessings did comparatively nothing for him. Why? Because there was one Mordecai—a Jew—and a servant of the king, who would not bow to him or do him reverence. His blessings—and they were neither few nor common—were more than counterbalanced by want of respect on the part of Mordecai the Jew. Mordecai's conduct should have been as the small dust in the balance; but it was not. It outweighed all that could be put into the opposite scale; and assuredly there was plenty to fill and load it. Doubtless Haman was an object of envy to the other courtiers, and there was not one of them that would not willingly have changed places with him when they observed what a favourite he was with the king; but, had they known all, instead of envying they would have pitied him. He was a fit object of pity. He confessed as much to his friends when, after discoursing to them on the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, and the tokens of royal favour which one time and another he had received, not omitting the invitation which he had got to Esther's banquet, he gave utterance to these words—"Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew," &c. Mordecai the Jew was the one drawback. Mordecai the Jew spoiled all; and it was Haman's conviction that he would continue to spoil all till he got rid of him and his insolence. Hence the advice tendered to him by Zeresh, his wife, and the assembled friends to prepare at once a gallows forty cubits high, and hang Mordecai thereon—which would have been a poor victory after all, though he had gained it. To convert an enemy into a friend is a far grander achievement than to seize and execute him.

Haman's confession is calculated to impress two things upon us:—(1) That material things cannot make us happy. This a truth which cannot be too deeply impressed upon us, and in which it would be well that men had more faith. If they had, there would be more of contentment and less of envy and covetousness in the world. The good—or those who have God for their portion—all are happy; and Haman did not belong to this class. Queen Esther did not scruple to apply to him the epithet "wicked"; and it is not to be wondered at that she did, when she thought on the arrangements which he had made to exterminate her people, herself and Mordecai included.

(2) That human happiness is all too easily destroyed. The work of destruction is, in general, easy. What is a flower worth after you roughly plant your foot upon it? What damage is done to a fair picture by throwing a bottle of ink against it! A servant can by mistake burn in a few minutes a MS. on which years of study were expended by her master. A succession of strokes with a hammer soon disfigure the most skilful and costly piece of furniture that ever was made; and it cannot have escaped the notice of any thoughtful man that human happiness is a flower of amazing delicacy. It takes but little to lay it low. A headache or the scratch of a pin unfits us for enjoying ourselves. An unkind remark renders us miserable for days. A disappointment does the same; and so with scores of other things. Mordecai's want of respect was in itself a small matter; but it sadly interfered with Haman's enjoyment. It had the effect of neutralising, and more than neutralising, all the felicities of his office and condition; and from our own experience we can understand perfectly how all of good that he possessed availed him nothing so long as Mordecai the Jew sat at the king's gate. He may be compared to the owner of a mansion sitting at a blind window seeing nothing, and all the while there are windows in every room from which excellent views of the surrounding scenery can be obtained, if he would only place himself at them and look through them.

Most of us can find out the mistakes into which Haman fell. They were two:—(1) He thought far too much about Mordecai's refusal to pay him the honour to which he considered he was entitled. For this he was to blame, inasmuch as we can choose our subjects, and God has given us control over our thoughts. He might have thought less about it; and it would have been for his good to have thought less about it. By dwelling upon it he excluded other subjects which would have been productive of happy feelings; and it was of such a nature that he could not think about it and retain his peace of mind. (2) Haman set too high a value on the respect of Mordecai, Mordecai was but one person, and it mattered little how he either felt or acted towards him. Enjoying, as he did, the favour and confidence of his king, surrounded by friends, rolling in wealth, and saluted by the king's servants as a class, could Haman not have

done admirably without the bow of Mordecai? He surely might. Had Mordecai bowed like the rest, that would not have added greatly to the happiness of Haman. He over-estimated Mordecai's respect mainly because he chose to withhold it. At the same time he under-estimated the blessings of which the expression in the text, "All this" is suggestive. They were nothing, because he had them; Mordecai's respect was everything, because he had it not: and I submit there is a close resemblance between too many of us and Haman the Agagite. We turn our backs on what we have, and we make ourselves wretched thinking about something or other that has been denied us. That something may be beauty, strength, health, genius, learning, rank, fame, a title, secular prosperity, a particular office or honour, a privilege, somebody's friendship—it matters not what. It rises before us coloured with the hues of the rainbow, but not being ours, we fret about it; and all that we have counts for nothing. We thus unwittingly rob ourselves of happiness.

The principal lesson to be learnt from the text is—To think more about what we have than what we want. What ruined Haman? Thinking about what he wanted. Never mind, my brother, what you want. Let us muse on what we have and in a variety of ways we will reap the advantage. It makes us grateful and contented to spread out before ourselves what we have; and let none of us forget that in God we have a Father; in Christ a Saviour; in the Holy Spirit a Sanctifier; and in the Bible a Guide to Heaven.

Mordecai

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"Do even so to Mordecai the Jew," etc.—Esther vi. 10

We are introduced to Mordecai occupying a very lowly position. It may have been that he had the care of the gate of the palace, to open and shut it, or that he had to take account of things that were taken into the palace. Possibly he sat as a beggar at the gate. This is not so probable, however, as that he had some occupation at the gate. Had he been a mere beggar, his word would not have had the weight which attached to it when he revealed a dangerous conspiracy. In the exercise of his duties he may have discovered the plot of Bigthana and Teresh. They may even have invited him to join them in the attempt to assassinate the king and seize—as would be possible in such a despotic country—the reins of government.

Anyhow, Mordecai occupied but an inferior office. The Persians who gossiped in the gateway little thought that in that humble Jew was the uncle of the queen and the future grand vizier of the king. He seems to have hidden the fact of relationship to Esther, lest he might hinder her advance to the coveted position and influence.

We are a little surprised that a man of such strong Jewish antipathies should have allowed his niece to enter the pagan palace. He may have desired that Esther should attain that position of sultana, that some good might thereby flow to his nation in their captivity. If this was his motive, we give him honour.

Our general impression of Mordecai, is that he was a very patient, thoughtful, far-sighted, decided, and God-fearing man. He was content—though his adopted daughter might be queen—to remain in obscurity, doing his duty to the one whose wages he received. For the peace of the king whom he served, as well as of the land in which he dwelt, he prayed that in the "peace thereof he might have peace." It seemed most improbable at one time that he should ever rise to any eminence. His race were in captivity, and doomed in a short time to be slaughtered. He was under the extreme displeasure of the prime minister, the source of promotion. Esther had not made known to the king her people, nor the relationship which Mordecai held to herself. He had no other friend to mention him to the king, much less to intercede that his life might be spared. His prospects were of the gloomiest description.

Mordecai may have blamed himself somewhat for his refusal to bend to Haman, yet not so much on his own account as on that of his people. He could not bear to think of what a number of innocents would suffer, of the misery which would be inflicted, of the homes which would be desolated, of the rivers of blood which would flow, and the heaps of the slain which would cumber the streets. For all this his sighs were many,

his heart was faint. Inly he wept as he thought of the approaching slaughter of his people, a slaughter such as would turn Persia into a shambles and an Aceldama from one end to the other. The posts had gone out, hurrying from place to place with the warrants for the destruction of the Jews, and in a few days they would be executed. Mordecai, in sackcloth and ashes, bemoans the dreadful condition in which he and his people were placed. He was prepared to bear the worst of Haman's rage, but he had not contemplated that it would go beyond himself. "Surely," he thought, "Haman might be contented to hang me on the prepared gallows; but these sheep, what have they done?" At such a time his conscience may have condemned him because he had entered the service of a pagan king, and sought for his adopted daughter a heathen alliance. It is always in such extremities that the best men will suffer most in conscience, and call up their various failures and imperfections. "Surely," they think, "God is punishing us for some forgotten sin, or for some well-remembered failing."

Thus was Mordecai troubled when he knew what was determined upon his people. Not only himself, but others were troubled. How fear palsied the heart of every Jew! It was mentioned with bated breath in the street or in the synagogue that they are all to die. Haman, their arch enemy, had persuaded the king that it would be to his profit to get rid of them from his empire. "Why does he not let us," say some, "go back to our own little Juæa? We will not trouble him more." Ah, no! Haman, the wily politician, persuaded the king that it would be to his profit to allow them to be cut off. He would pay a great sum to be permitted to carry out the king's decision; and besides, a large sum would roll into the king's treasury from their forfeited wealth and confiscated estates. The assent to the horrible slaughter had been given, the compact of blood had been sealed. The two who made and sealed it are untroubled. "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed." What a contrast is presented in these few words, and yet are there not such taking place every day and everywhere? Poverty and wealth, misery and merriment, health and disease are side by side, divided oftentimes by very thin partitions. Lavish luxury abuts on hungry penury, criminal designs ride in the same conveyance with unsuspecting virtue. We have even heard of magistrates who, having condemned a poor child or a frail woman for some trifling infringement of law, to severe punishment, go home to their cushioned comforts, dinings and winings, and perhaps to dicing and gambling. And it is a very painful contrast to see many Christians contenting themselves by doing nothing beyond seeking their own ease, while great part of the Christian world is stirred by intense controversy about the truth, and while myriads of heathen are dying without a knowledge of Christ or hope of Heaven.

Ahasuerus owed much to Mordecai, even his life. Ahasuerus was glad of the information which warned him against the conspirators; but now the life of the very one who had saved him is in danger. He has placed him thoughtlessly in that danger. There is a great sin at his door, and sin which cannot altogether be excused on the ground of thoughtfulness. He had no right to sign in such a hurried manner the decree involving such widespread misery; at least he might have made some exemptions on behalf of any who might be his friends. The king acted as a careless youth might do to a poor worm in his path. He is absolute, and finds even a gratification in showing thus his great power; he cares no more for the ruin about to be wrought than would the members of a gay cavalcade, prancing by in the sunshine, for the feeble cry of some poor dog in a ditch.

The hopes of Mordecai and his race are changing to despair. A few brief hours, and that Jewish race will be banished from existence, that remnant of the Church which had been brought through the Red Sea and the wilderness would be exterminated, and the promises of God that a Deliverer should come from Shiloh frustrated.

Tears and moans, sackcloth and ashes, were found in many a home. The face of the aged man became blanched with fear, and strong men bowed themselves at the thought of the approaching massacre. The fond husband quitted his work to hasten home, fearing lest wife and children might not already have been slain. The betrothed questioned eagerly the rumour, and sought to read in eyes half-averted a contradiction of her worst fears. Mordecai still sits in the king's gate, praying that the God Who had delivered His people aforetime from Egyptians and Philistines, would now save them from these Persians, by causing help to "arise from some quarter."

Come now and gaze at night-time on another scene. Look into that chamber where lies the king. His guards are fast asleep around; but evidently their royal master is

vainly seeking that which they enjoy. "Oh for a few hours' sleep!" he cries. Play more softly, ye daughters of music; float, ye perfumes, soothingly around the restless monarch. See, he turns again on his silken couch. It is the third time the last few minutes. What is it that holds his mind waking? Does the sound of wailing in the "perplexed city," stealing through the thick walls, drown the music and penetrate his soul? Is it the thought of the misery of many of his subjects that at last troubles his mind? Truly, could he have glanced into many Jewish homes, he had been sad enough; but it may have been after all merely indigestion arising from surfeiting and drinking, or at best anxiety about himself; or it may have been that he was planning some further expedition for aggrandisement of his already overgrown empire. To desire increase of territory is the ruling passion of kings and emperors. It may have been this desire, or something unsuggested that held Ahasuerus waking. Any way it was not fitting, on the night previous to the proposed execution of an innocent man who had once saved his life, that the king should sleep soundly. Some earnestly uttered prayer of this same doomed man may have passed like an airy but disturbing spirit through those damask curtains surrounding the king's couch. Somehow or other, "on that night could not the king sleep." What a trifling circumstance to be recorded in the sacred narrative! Yet it is no trifle. On that sleeplessness of the king on that particular night, hangs the fate of thousands and of the Jewish Church. "What ails me to-night?" says Ahasuerus to himself. "I cannot sleep; perhaps the monotonous tones of a reader's voice might give me sleep. Hey, guards! Let the music cease, and call hither the chronicler of my kingdom."

The chroniclers called for celebrated every important event of a Persian monarch's reign. They were written in verse to make them the more attractive. Some of the best Persian poetry which remains to this day is nothing more than the chronicles of the kingdom, such as Tamerlane had afterwards, and in which he read all the night prior to his mortal combat with Bajazet.

Although a little surprised at the desire of the king at that hour, the reader quietly enters, opens the book, and begins in a clear but monotonous tone to read. He has not gone far before he comes, most providentially, to the place which recounts a great danger in which the king had been placed, and his deliverance therefrom.

"Mordecai! Mordecai! ah, he was faithful to my interest, and now I seem surrounded by self-seekers. Who is he? Where is he? What reward has been given him?" asks the king.

Answers the chronicler, "There hath nothing been done for him."

Yes, it had happened to Mordecai as to Joseph, when forgotten by the butler whose dreams he had told, he, a deliverer, was neglected.

"But who is he?"

"A Jew who sitteth at the king's gate."

"A Jew! Why I have signed a decree consigning them all to destruction."

There is a deep silence. The chronicler reads on; but the king heeds not. He is pondering over the motives of Haman to get rid of the Jews. What could induce him to offer so large a sum for their destruction as ten thousand talents? If it were for my interest, it could have been paid out of my treasury, instead of being paid in by him. There is something behind all this that I do not understand. Haman has shown some little presumption lately. I will test him in the morning.

The king reclines again. A fitful doze follows. When he awakes, the rays of the morning sun are streaming into the rose-perfumed and spray-cooled court. It is still early. As he glances beyond the curtain drawn over the doorway of his bedchamber he discerns a figure in the outer court, that of Haman. "Let him come in," is the king's command to the lord of his bedchamber. Gladly Haman enters, to pay his morning salutations to the king, and to seize what he hopes will be a fitting opportunity "to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows he has prepared for him." The request is ready to leap from his lips; but the king prevents him by asking, as though in some fanciful humour, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?"

For further honour Haman can forego the preferring of his request to another time. "Honour! Whom will the king honour but myself? Honour! ah, there is the long-coveted one of wearing the purple, and seeing how the crown fits my brow." He makes his suggestion, and is particular in desiring that none but the very highest prince shall be his equery. Mark the sarcastic smile that flits over the face of the king.

"Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate." How exact and detailed the description of the person intended! What a cut for Haman! What! array him whom he had hoped to strip; prepare a triumph for one for whom he had prepared a tree; become a crier, herald, lacquey, underling, to one whom he had so completely despised that he "scorned to lay hands on him alone"?

Is the king in earnest? Is it not simply some strange freak of his majesty? Haman hesitates. The king continues in emphatic tone, "And let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." The king spoke in italics.

Never was confusion greater, or fall more sudden. Never was command more unwillingly obeyed. From the king's presence Haman goes to the gate. "Mordecai, you are wanted in the palace." Meanwhile the robes have been prepared. Haman places the purple on Mordecai's shoulders. Mordecai understands not that which has befallen him. Is it in mockery, prior to his execution on that grim gallows which, in front of Haman's house, has risen so rapidly during the night? Is he to be an unconscious type of that Christ Who had, ages after, to be clothed in purple ere He was led to crucifixion—that Christ Who was and is still, by many, the neglected Deliverer?

Imagine the feelings of Haman, who "had made a bridge of his own shadow, and fell into the brook." What a comedy of errors must his life appear.

With the least ceremony, throwing the purple on the shoulders of Mordecai, and crushing the crown upon his head, he seeks at the same time to crush down his own rebellious inclinations. Not a word passes between these two bitter enemies; but their souls are heaving with emotions indescribable. What flashes of hate leap from their eyes as they meet!

Mordecai is speedily mounted, and Haman, taking the bridle, leads the charger through the city. The heralds precede, proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." Hard was it for Haman to bear the looks and queries and jibes of the citizens and servants. Evidently the king had changed in his feelings towards his former favourite. Possibly he repented giving his consent to the purposed slaughter, and would thus intimate it to Haman. He could not change the changeless decree, but he can in a measure nullify its effect. How shall Haman dare to carry out such a desire against a people thus honoured in one of their race?

Well was it both for the character of the king and for the prosperity of Mordecai, that the king called for the chronicles. Ahasuerus knew it not, nor did Mordecai, but *a Divine hand was in a sleepless night.*

On some such trifle as that may hang interests as immense to us as to Mordecai and the Jews. Our eternal welfare is beyond all computation in value. But possibly we have not sought it. Possibly we too have neglected the Deliverer Who on Calvary interposed His life to save ours. At times there may have come over us a conviction of our sins; and perhaps we are not altogether strangers to that sleeplessness caused by spiritual anxiety. At such times, have we called for the record, have we turned to the Sacred Word, have we been struck with the power of that name of Jesus, as Ahasuerus by that of Mordecai? Deserves not He our highest praise, as Mordecai deserved the greatest honour of Ahasuerus? Yes; and unto Him be all honour, and power, and wisdom, and might. Most suddenly did the king remember and reward his faithful deliverer. Oh that Jesus might as suddenly take His proper position in our hearts, and reign Lord of every motive and affection there!

From Mordecai's history we may gather something to *stimulate our spirits in the battle of life.* He earned his elevation. Perhaps, as a Jew, he was a little revengeful towards aliens; but he filled well a lowly position, and so was better prepared for a higher. Shall we desire rather to reap rewards than to sow the seed which will produce them? And shall we not gather stimulus from the way in which, in doing his duty and keeping his integrity, he felt that he was already rewarded? And shall we not learn to be patient? Our *impatience* is our great hindrance. We do not wait, trusting in God, as Mordecai. Yet "He knoweth the way that we take," and in His own time will bring us forth when sufficiently tested. And shall we not gather lessons from the way in which his prosperity was *materially aided by his faith and prayer*? By his words to Esther we are sure he looked to God for deliverance. When the deliverance came, it included his prosperity as well as that of his people, just as a stranded vessel, when again floating, bears forward any passengers on board. Mordecai had firmly believed that, even though Esther held her peace, "enlargement and deliverance would

arise to the Jews from some other place." We can pray to be made faithful, holy, earnest, and in due time the reward will come. It will then be, in a sense, the result of prayer.

Shall we not gather *encouragement* in seeing how elevation comes when *hopes are at the lowest ebb*? On what a trifle those hopes depended! Be prepared to seize the trifles, and remember that the darkest night ushers in the brighter morning.

Mordecai's elevation was *approved by his fellow-men*. We are told that he was "accepted from the multitude of his brethren." There was little envy at his rise, because there was much humility in the man. So there are men in whose prosperity we may delight, because, instead of being puffed up and purse-proud, they maintain their former humility and practise greater liberality.

Mordecai used his elevation *for the best purposes*. He sought the welfare of his people, and spoke "peace to all his seed." Not only so, but there is a tradition that many of the Persians, and even the king, believed in God through him.

Job

BY REV. ALFRED AINGER, M.A.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," etc.—Job i. 21.

The authorship and date of the Book of Job are problems yet unsolved. This only is certain, that it presents a picture of a very early civilization. It is not Jewish. It stands out, indeed, among the Jewish Scriptures by its un-Judaic character. Its religion, manners, scenery, are Gentile. And yet, in many respects, it appeals to modern sympathies, even to Christian sympathies, more immediately than the records of the chosen people themselves. For the very vagueness of time and scene has the effect of making more universal the moral of this story of man's trial and God's justification. We feel separated from Jewish history by the strongly-marked impress of the Hebrew mind. The teaching of the Book of Job is unlocalized, and is of all time because it seems to be of no special time.

Hence it is that portions of this ancient book sound to us so strangely modern; and the verse before us is one in point. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." It is a height of spirituality which we are not prepared for in a civilization so remote. It sounds rather like the triumphant death-cry of a Christian martyr than the calm confession of an Arab chief. It suggests the more profound of David's Psalms, or the outpourings of heart of a St. Paul. It is not merely the philosophic calmness of the Cicero, or the religious patience of an Epictetus. There is a ring of enthusiasm in the words, the spirit of a mind possessed with the reality of a Divine world above and beyond this. And we feel, with shame it may be, how we are with difficulty trying to enter the same sphere of faith; how far we are from being able to say, "Thy will be done"; how still further we are from the true spirit of thankfulness to God that His will is being fulfilled, because that will is good.

For we are here regarding Job's first emotion on hearing of his losses and bereavements, before his orthodox and well-meaning friends came to confuse his moral sense, and pervert his old and true convictions of God's ways. We cannot now enter in detail upon the arguments of Eliphaz, and Bildad, and Zophar. But bearing in memory the ingenious theories which they broached of the meaning of suffering, we see even a new pathos in the first instinct of the good man's heart that suffering has an aspect in which it may be regarded apart from its causes, direct or indirect. The three friends went casting about for the cause of this sudden affliction. Had it happened to themselves, they would probably have regarded it as a trial; happening to another, they saw in it a judgment. But the first thoughts of the sufferer himself were, as is so often the case, the best thoughts; and if, under the sophistries of his consolers, he wavered for a time, he comes in the end to those third thoughts which are "a ripper first." And this is the moral of the Book of Job, that there are lessons in suffering or loss as true and precious as those which are learnt from regarding it as punishment: and this truth, though we are surprised to find it enforced so long ago, is one which we are still far from having mastered.

No doubt there is a connection between suffering and sin. We know that much of the

trouble that is in the world proceeds from wilful violation of God's laws, and much more from a violation of them through ignorance. We cannot break one of God's laws without reaping the penalty. This source of suffering could not of course be ascribed by Job's friends to him. His possessions were taken from him through no fault of his own; and the death of his sons through a sudden tempest was manifestly what we still call "the act of God." The three friends' notion of suffering and sin was the vulgar notion of an arbitrary penalty sent for disobedience; the same which saw in the fall of a tower in Siloam, a judgment upon the sinners who chanced to be standing below it. Job, who had no theories to which facts must be squared, saw with truer eyes. He had served God always. His conscience did not deceive him in this. The sacred historian confirms the language of the sufferer. And being thus assured of the love he bore to God, he could not see in the afflictions which were sent to him a punishment sent for sin. His friends thought him self-righteous, and doubtless there are some who still take this view of his character. But Job felt sure that true humility could not be worth much if it was not sincere. And how could it be sincere if it contradicted the voice by which God had been speaking to him all these years? He had made God his friend; he had served Him in faith and fear; he had felt the sunshine of His favour resting upon his head. Was this experience worth nothing; and was it to be lost directly trouble came? If misfortune proved that all this time he had been a hypocrite, what was communion with and experience of God worth? If chastisement meant that he was not a true son of his Father in Heaven, but a bastard, what had been gained by the chastisement? In the problem presented here to Job was the dawn of that light which burst in all its fulness upon mankind in the Son of God. We have here a true foreshadowing of the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief; of Him Who was made perfect by sufferings, not because of the Father's hate, but because of His great love.

It is just this view of God's dealings with His children that we are apt to lose sight of, through our habit of looking for judgments and causes within our own small range of sight, and of dictating to the sufferer the truths which we think he ought to see. But, in truth, he cannot see what we, standing by and uttering our mealy-mouthed proprieties, think *we* see; and, moreover, he sees what we cannot see. For there are things of Heaven and earth which only those eyes can see which are purged by tears. And on either side of the burdened spirit stands the tempter, trying to shut out the view that the eyes behold. On one side it says, "Curse God and die. Why will you still believe in a Father and a friend? What you so imagine is but an iron law which rides roughshod over the upturned faces of men. There is no pity, no love in Fate. Better to die, and so at last defy its power." On the other side comes the voice of the slanderer, saying, "Leave the comfort and the grace of the consoling Saviour; look into your own self, and recognize the hideous hypocrisy of your heart. Lament your sinfulness; confess that you have never acted as a child of God at all, and that hence is your punishment. Be wiser than your Maker, and, instead of learning to thank Him for what He gives and for what He takes away, linger in the region of your own sinful nature; and, instead of the love of a Father, recognize only the triumph of an offended enemy."

These are the rival forms of temptation presented to Job, by his wife on the one hand, by his three friends on the other. But he was wiser than both, for he saw what they could not see. Ever since that day has the tempter's voice been ready to make affliction an instrument for darkening the face of Heaven. And the instinct of sonship, which was so strong in Job, we, blessed with the great heritage of Christianity, are often so slow to attain to. We have the treasured experience of centuries, the records of the struggles and temptations and triumphs of so many suffering men, and the power of seeing in the world's history how in God's ways, which are not ours, that which seemed evil has proved to be good, and that out of death, and loss, and disappointment, blessings have arisen to strengthen and console; and still the old-truth of Job's confession is hard to master. For, however much the reason is convinced that suffering and sacrifice are necessary ministers of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that in things evil there dwells a soul of good, "would men observingly distil it out," we each, for himself, have to make it our own by another path. He who has searched out the stories of other men has acquired the knowledge of a fact; but only in the sphere of his own communion with God can he make the knowledge a power and a blessing, a stepping-stone to Heaven, a realization of things not seen.

Supplementary

Lot's Wife

BY REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

"Remember Lot's wife."—St. Luke xvii. 32.

But *what* are we to remember? What is the precise point which the example of Lot's wife is adduced to illustrate? Obviously, it is the peril of looking back, of hanging in poise, of halting between two, in the critical moments of life, in hours of decision.

Now such crises may be rare—Coleridge affirms that they are rare, that "*seldom* comes the moment in life" so charged as "to make a great decision possible"; but they come to us all: crises in which we have to make an instant choice between evil and good, between that which is sensuous and temporary and that which is spiritual and eternal. And our choice is our doom, our judgment. By every such decision we betray our ruling aim, and adjudge ourselves worthy, or unworthy, of eternal life. It is to help us in these choices, to guide us to a wise decision, to warn us that it must be prompt, whole-hearted, irrevocable, that our Lord bids us "remember Lot's wife."

When the hour of judgment struck with her, she made—possibly by the persuasions of her husband and children, possibly by the terrors of the moment, she was constrained to make—the right choice. But her heart was not in it, or, at least, her whole heart. And what wonder? The command of Jehovah was clear and imperative indeed: "Up, take thy wife and thy daughters, lest thou be consumed"; and, again, "Escape for thy life; *look not behind thee*, neither stay thou in all the Circle; escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed." But they had grown wealthy at Sodom, and had risen to respect and honour. Her children had been bred, if not born, there; some of them had married there, and so settled down into the life of the city that they had refused to leave it. Even Lot himself had "lingered" when the command first came, and had shewn himself so loath to leave a place endeared to him by many attachments and associations that the Angels had to take him by the hand, "the Lord being merciful unto him," and drag him out of the city. What wonder, then, if so soon as they had reached a halting-place, and could look back from the hill of Zoar, and see the terrible volcanic outburst by which the guilty city was consumed, that his wife fell back behind him, "and *looked back* from behind him"?

Who can tell by how many emotions she was drawn to violate, or even led to forget, the Divine command, "Look not behind thee"? Curiosity, awe, terror, may all have impelled her, as well as love for the children left behind and the place in which she had known so many happy prosperous hours. But, happily for us, the word and laws of God hold on their course, we do not escape their sweep and stroke, however innocent our intentions may be, or however strangely compounded of ill and good. The motives of Lot's wife may have been innocent enough, or even laudable: for what of wrong is there in loving a place in which we have lived, or even in an overmastering desire to turn and look at a great and terrible spectacle? and how can a mother's heart but go out to her children when they are in deadly peril? But however innocent her motives may have been, or however strangely innocent may have been blended with wrong motives and desires, she had to take the consequences and bear the penalty of her action all the same. Smothered with the sulphurous smoke of the volcanic flames, just as the elder Pliny was suffocated with the fumes of sulphur and bitumen at the destruction of Pompeii, she fell into a heap, and was gradually encrusted with the saline particles of which the air in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea is still full. Such heaps, or lumps, formed from spray, mist, and saline exhalations, which have gathered round a core of fallen trees or beasts, are still common on the shores of that Sea of Salt, and always have been common. Josephus identified one of them with Lot's wife more than eighteen centuries ago, as the Arabs do to this day.

We need not see a miracle, therefore, in the death of Lot's wife, but an illustration of natural laws. Nor need we assume that, because she suffered such things as these,

she was a sinner above all other women, or that her fate in the world beyond death at all resembled her fate in this world. She may be a very sufficient and wholesome warning for us without all that, a warning against indecision and a double mind. Nay, I think that, without all that, she may be a *more* wholesome and effective warning. For she may serve to remind us, not only of the peril of indecision, and a divided heart, but also of the strange mysterious way in which the laws of God exact their penalties of us, whatever, and however innocent, the intention with which we violate them. The good and well-meaning have to pay these penalties, no less than the bad who mean ill. The best and kindest actions may entail them upon us as well as the most selfish and the worst. You may sit up every night for a week to nurse a sick mother or a dying child, after having worked all day for their support; but your health suffers from the strain as surely as if some ill or sordid motive had kept you from your bed. You may rush into or through the flames to rescue a helpless victim from the fire; but the flames will as surely burn you as though your errand had been to steal your neighbour's gold.

And it is well that the divine laws do hold on their course, however undeserved the suffering they inflict. For, if they did not, who could be sure of anything? how could we calculate and forecast the issues of any of our deeds? The whole frame of human life would be thrown out of gear, and we should be reduced to a hopeless inutility and confusion, if we could not count on the invariable action of natural laws, even though their action may seem at times cruel and unjust—if water did not drown, if fire did not burn, if smoke did not smother, and steam did not expand.

But though we may admit that Lot's wife was impelled to look back by perfectly natural emotions, some of which were innocent or even laudable, we must also admit, I think, that these innocent emotions were blended with emotions which had some taint of guilt and disobedience. For the word used in Genesis (xix. 26) when we are told that she "*looked back*" on the burning city is a different and much stronger word than that that used two verses lower down, where we are told that Abraham "*looked toward* Sodom and Gomorrah." Abraham's look was only a rapid and terrified glance; but the look of Lot's wife was—so the word implies—a look "of deliberate contemplation, of stedfast regard, of *strong desire*." She looked back wistfully, longingly, as one whose treasure was in the City, and whose heart was there also. She would fain have gone after her heart had she dared. She would rather have stayed amid all the sins of Sodom, if she might have carried on her old easy life in it, than have climbed the mountain, to commence a new life and to dwell apart with God. Her look was an unspoken prayer; and her prayer was answered; she knew "the misery of a *granted* prayer." She lingered behind as one who would fain stay behind and she *did* stay, though only as a heap of salt, and of salt that had lost its savour.

There is a grave warning for us here; and for this warning also we may well "remember Lot's wife." If we suffer her, she will speak to us not only of the peril of a divided heart, but also of the peril of prayer—the peril of cherishing those ardent desires which are often our most fervent prayers.

Some of you may remember that Emerson commenced his career as a Unitarian minister, and that the first sermon he preached had Prayer for its theme. The three divisions of his sermon were: (1) *All men are always praying*; (2) *All their prayers are answered*; (3) *Therefore we ought to be very careful what we ask for*. And in the history of Lot's wife, or of her lingering longing look, we may find an illustration of each of these remarkable divisions, and an explanation of assertions which may perplex the immature mind: viz., that "*all men are always praying*," and that "*all their prayers are answered*."

Prayer need not be vocal. You may pray without falling on your knees or opening your lips. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire," the soul's strong and ruling desire, whether "uttered or unexpressed." And as all men have and cherish strong desires, even though they do not put them into words, there is a sense in which it is true that "all men are always praying." And these ruling desires have a strange power, a strange trick, of fulfilling themselves. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," says the Wise Man. And it is equally true that as a man *desireth* in his heart so is he. Our several characters are but the sum of the ruling aims and desires which we have cherished and pursued. Desire breeds action, and action habit, and habit doom. We *are* what we would be, although we are *not* what we would be. That is to say, our present character is the result of the cravings and desires we have cherished and indulged, though they do not correspond to the highest ideal which, in our better moods and hours of

recollection, we have been able to frame. For *this* is an ideal which we have not always held, or to which we have not always been true. If at times we have desired "good things," at other times we have desired "evil things," or have even mistaken evil for good. And thus we have arrived at that complex, and often contradictory, state in which good and evil are so strangely blended that, while we *are* what we have desired to be, we *are not* what we would be, and even find that we cannot do the good we would, while the evil we would not, that we do.

But if these strong ruling desires are our real prayers, and *have* this strange trick of fulfilling themselves, then it is true, as Emerson says, both that *all* our prayers are answered, and that we should be very careful what we pray for—very careful, especially, over our *unspoken* prayers. For when we *speak* with God, if we speak at all intelligently and sincerely, we realise His presence; and in the light of that pure Presence we sift, and purge, and raise our desires; we ask for that which is really good, or for that which we honestly think it will be good for us to have; and we at least try to subordinate our wills to His. But when we pray without words, when we simply cherish a strong desire which, though it may spring from nothing better than a sensual or a selfish craving for ease or pleasure, has yet all the force of a prayer, we may forget the pure and awful Presence in which we always stand; we may fail to test our desire by the high standard of His will; we may make no effort to sift, purge, and raise our souls; and before we have recognized our evil plight, we too may know the misery of a granted prayer, and be suffocated by the world's breath and encrusted with its eating and consuming salt.

Miriam

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"*Miriam the prophetess.*"—*Exodus xv. 20.*

We read of no sister of Moses and Aaron but Miriam; she must therefore have been the sister who was set to watch what would become of the infant Moses in the ark of bulrushes. This makes her several years older than Moses, and of Aaron too, for there were but three years between the brothers.

She was old enough to be set to watch, and intelligent enough to know what to do when Pharaoh's daughter found the child. Had she been a grown woman, she could not have done better than she did; for she offered to call one of the Hebrew women to act as nurse, and then went and called the child's mother—her own mother too. Her mother doubtless had told her what to do; but she could not have foreseen all that would happen: from what she did, we may set Miriam down as a trusty and intelligent child. We may also gather that she was thoughtful enough to understand the cruel circumstances of her little brother's birth, when it was necessary to hide him in order to save him from being killed. Danger and fear make a deep impression on a child, and our earliest impressions are generally the strongest. These early days gave a tone to her character. In youth we can fancy her thoughtful beyond her years; and this seriousness probably she never lost.

Many years pass before we again meet with Miriam. During this time her life was separated from that of Moses. When once he had been taken to court as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, it is not likely that he saw much of his own family, and when he fled from Egypt all intercourse ceased. We know nothing of Miriam during this time. But we may conclude that, after the death of her parents, she and Aaron lived together. It is probably on this account that when we meet with her again we find her called "Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron"—not of Aaron and Moses, because of her long separation from Moses.

She is called "Miriam, the prophetess." The word prophet, or prophetess, is not confined in Scripture to those endued with the power of foretelling the future; it is often applied to those who in other ways spoke in the name of the Lord. This Miriam did in her song of triumph. Yet in the prophecy of Micah we find these words, "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." It seems likely therefore that Miriam had more to do with the deliverance of the children of Israel than is expressly mentioned, and that the direct inspiration given to Moses, and in a measure to Aaron, was shared by her also.

While Moses, brought up at the court, had become learned in all the learning of the Egyptians, Miriam had not neglected to cultivate her gifts. She had the natural gift of music—a special and most delightful gift—and she had made the most of it. She had learnt the use of the timbrel. It was an ancient Hebrew musical instrument, like a tambourine, or small drum. We read of it long before this time, in Laban's expostulation with Jacob, though it is there called *tabret*. Miriam, in the land of bondage, had learnt the use of this national instrument, and had also cultivated the gift of song. When Moses and the men had sung the song beginning, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously," then Miriam and the women took up the strain. They went forth in a triumphal procession, "with timbrels and with dances," and Miriam was their leader. The women answered the men, singing and playing, as it seems, in alternate parts. Miriam perhaps sang the words alone, and the women joined in chorus with their instruments. At all events, Miriam was their chief: the first player, and the leading female singer—their *prima donna*.

That name is usually applied to a leading singer of secular music, one who takes the chief part of an opera; and fabulous sums are often paid to a *prima donna* of unusual excellence. In such cases the gift of song, trained and cultivated to the highest pitch, is used for the mere pleasing of the ear. The pleasure may, or may not, be pure and refined; but pleasure it is, and nothing more; in singing of this kind there is no higher aim. But this is not the highest aim of music. The gift of song is God's gift, and is to be used chiefly in His praise and for His glory. If not thus used, it fails of its true purpose. The voice may be of the sweetest, the taste exquisite, the execution a very marvel; yet there is something wanting, and that, the main thing of all—a heart attuned to the praise of God, and having His glory as the aim and object.

It is delightful to hear the highest skill applied to the highest object. It is among the chief of earthly pleasures, to listen to the praises of God sung and performed with the highest art that earth can produce. Yet earth has but cultivated the gift of God. Music is from Him. It should be used in His service; it will be perfect in His presence only.

They who thus use the gift of song in the public service of God should look well to it that His praise and glory be indeed their aim. Did Miriam think of *herself*, when she took the timbrel in hand? Were her thoughts upon her own sweet voice, and skilful fingers, and graceful gestures, and upon the impression they would make upon those who saw and heard? "Sing ye to the Lord!" were her words; and "Sing ye to the Lord" expressed the feeling of her heart. Not for her own glorification did she sing and play, but to the praise and glory of God.

It is sad to turn from harmony to discord, from men and women together praising God, to a scene of envy and strife, and that between members of one family. Yet it is such a scene that meets us, when next we read of Miriam.

"And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses, because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath He not spoken also by us?" Who was this Ethiopian woman? Zipporah; for there is no reason to think that Moses ever had any other wife. But Zipporah was a *Midianite*, the daughter of Jethro, and sister to Hobab; and she had been married to Moses forty years and more. Ethiopian however is the same as *Cushite*, and that name was used very widely, taking in the Arabians, and so the Midianites: there is no difficulty therefore on that score. And though at first sight it seems that Miriam and Aaron were angry with Moses for having lately married this wife, of whom they did not approve, yet even their own words show that that was *not* the reason of their anger. They spake against him "*because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married*," but not because he had married her: that was an old story; something fresh had arisen: What was it? We find it in the preceding chapter.

Moses, by God's command, had chosen seventy men of the elders of Israel, that He might put His Spirit upon them, and so they might help Moses in ruling the people. Moses, acting doubtless by God's express guidance, made the choice, as it appears, without consulting any one; and God ratified it by causing His Spirit to rest on the men chosen. But this was much the same course as Moses had before taken by the advice of his father-in-law Jethro, Zipporah's father; and both Zipporah, the daughter, and Hobab, the son, of Jethro, were still with Moses. Aaron and Miriam, in their dissatisfaction and jealousy, supposed perhaps that the wife and her brother had been consulted, while Moses' own brother and sister's opinion was not asked. Jethro's advice

had been followed before; now it was by his son and daughter that Moses was guided. Hence this jealousy and these murmurs.

The jealousy was partly felt towards Zipporah, but Moses himself was the chief object of it. Who was he—their youngest brother—that he should thus act without them? Had the Lord spoken only by *him*? Had he not also spoken by *them*? Thus they murmured. It was true the Lord had at times spoken by them; but not as He had revealed Himself to Moses: and on this occasion He had spoken to Moses alone? How different was their spirit from that of Moses! When Eldad and Medad prophesied without joining themselves to Moses, and Joshua begged him to forbid them, this was his answer: “Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!” Aaron and Miriam, on the contrary, were jealous, not for the honour of God, but for their own; and their fear was, not lest others should set at nought the authority of Moses, but lest Moses should deprive them of theirs. It was a pitiful jealousy. If God had indeed spoken by them, all thought of personal dignity and importance should have been swallowed up in a solemn sense of the voice of God. Was it to make them great in the eyes of men that He spoke by them? Dared they to come between Him and the choice of His instruments? This envy of a brother was wrong; but their fault was deeper than that. In murmuring against Moses, they did in fact murmur against God. They dared not directly complain that God gave their younger brother the pre-eminence, so they turned their complaints against Moses himself. Why did he take so much on himself? Why did he set himself up alone as the mouthpiece of God? These two were doing exactly what Moses afterwards reproved Korah and his followers for doing with regard to Aaron himself: “for which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together *against the Lord*: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against *him*?”

Which was most in fault, Aaron or Miriam? We are not told; but usually, where two together are in the wrong, one or other of them is the leader. Miriam’s name comes first, whereas we should have expected Aaron’s. Perhaps therefore she was chief in this transgression, and led Aaron astray. This is the more likely, because of what is said of Moses’ wife. Jealousy is more common between one woman and another than between a man and a woman. Miriam was jealous of Zipporah’s influence with Moses, and hence both she and Aaron were jealous of Moses’ communication from God. Envy is easily stirred; it is harder work to lead to an unselfish contentment. Even without a word of persuasion, an envious spirit is apt to spread. Let all beware of spreading his poison by word or example.

The nearer people are to each other, the more danger there is of envy. Zipporah might have escaped the ill-will of Miriam, had she not been married to Miriam’s brother; and had Moses been a stranger, this brother and sister would probably not have envied him. Just where there ought to be the least, there often is found the most of envy and jealousy. Family ties are of God’s making, and among those of one household love ought to reign; yet too often envy creeps into families, and brothers and sisters are divided by jealousy. Thus do sin and Satan spoil God’s ordinance.

What follows makes it almost certain that it was Miriam who was chiefly in fault. The chastisement fell upon her alone. When she and Aaron thus murmured, “the Lord heard it.” That is expressly mentioned; our attention is drawn to it. They probably spoke only to one another and to Moses: but “the Lord heard.” The Lord always hears. Every envious and unloving word is heard by Him: yet more, every envious thought and feeling is open to His sight. He is always displeased at such feelings and words. He was highly displeased here with Miriam and Aaron.

Did they not tremble when summoned to appear with Moses before the Lord? And yet more, when the pillar of cloud that was over the Tabernacle came down and rested at the door of the Tabernacle, showing the immediate presence of Jehovah there, and these two were called to come forth before Him alone, without Moses even—did they not tremble then?

Then the Lord spoke to them. It had pleased Him to make Moses more than a prophet, more than either of *them*. To an ordinary prophet God made Himself known from time to time in visions and dreams, and revealed His will to him “in dark speeches,” in figurative and mysterious words, not always understood even by him who was to speak them. Thus probably He had revealed Himself to Aaron and Miriam. But to Moses He had given a far closer manifestation of His will and presence; with him He had spoken “mouth to mouth”; nay more, the Lord had actually *shown* Himself to

him,—“and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold.” “Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?” Thus sternly did the Lord Himself set before them their presumption.

“And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and He departed. And the cloud removed from off the Tabernacle.” The presence of the Lord was withdrawn in displeasure; and Miriam and Aaron knew that it was for their sin.

And then fell the chastisement. “And, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow; and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.” It was his office to judge of leprosy: he looked, not only as her brother and companion in transgression, but also as priest; and he saw that she was smitten not only with leprosy, but with leprosy of the most deadly kind, commonly incurable.

Then he interceded for her. Not a word did she say for herself. Smitten, terrified, horror-struck, conscious of her sin and of God's hand laid upon her—she could not speak. Nor did Aaron dare to speak to God. They are brought to the dust, these proud and envious seekers of their own glory. How changed is Aaron's tone! And if *he* was thus brought low, surely the stricken one herself went with him in heart, while he humbly pleaded with Moses.

Now at length they realize the greatness of Moses with God. Now they speak to him with whom they had lately claimed equality, as if, while they could do nothing, he could do all. “Alas, my Lord, I beseech Thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half-consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.”

Unless the leprosy were taken away, Miriam must thenceforth live apart from all she loved—a living death—dead to all happiness and comfort: already, her face had become like that of a corpse, and her skin—but lately sound and healthy—was now like that of an abortive infant. “Let her not be such,” pleaded Aaron; and Miriam stood by and heard—for she was not yet separated—and doubtless her looks and her tears pleaded for her too.

We have here nothing to do with Moses except as relates to Miriam. Yet we cannot but notice his conduct as contrasted with her's and Aaron's. “The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Such was his *character*; but these words also describe his conduct on this occasion. He bore their murmurings meekly; we read of no word spoken by him in reply: the Lord alone spoke. And afterwards he showed no resentment, but most willingly interceded for Miriam; “Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee.” His meekness and forgiveness set forth in a stronger light the fault of Miriam and Aaron.

The intercession was heard, and Miriam was restored. Yet not without chastisement. If she had at any time been justly chastised by her earthly father, or if he had even put on her an undeserved affront and mark of contempt, would she not have retired for shame? How much more, when God Himself had visited her, in her body, with so severe a sign of His displeasure? We are not told whether she was healed *immediately*, or after the seven days: at all events, she was not allowed at once to mix with others; “let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.” Such was the sentence. It was in agreement with the Levitical law; and it was exactly carried out. “And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days, and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.”

Probably she was truly penitent, even when Moses interceded for her; the chastening hand of God had already humbled her. But that seven days' separation was good and wholesome for her. It was a time for quiet thought and self-examination and prayer. She was humbled in the sight of others. All knew why the stroke had fallen, and why she was sent apart, and why the camp remained stationary; and when she was received again, though thankful, she cannot but have felt humbled and abashed. But, humbled and penitent, she meekly submitted to this; we read of no more rebellion or murmuring.

Miriam was restored to the camp, and doubtless she was restored also to a better mind; she came back, we may believe, cleansed, not only from leprosy, but also from a proud and envious spirit. “He restoreth my soul” is the description of one part of the Shepherd's work. This work He is continually doing; and, in great measure, by means of chastisement. It is *grace* alone that restores—the grace of God, the care and love of the Shepherd, the work of the Spirit—but it is when humbled by chastisement that the heart becomes submissive, and is willing and glad to be restored. There is no backsliding so grievous, but that God can bring back the backslider; no fall so great, but

that He can lift up the fallen. And when the fallen is raised, and the backslider returns, how joyfully and lovingly are they welcomed by all who love God !

Here, though she lived for forty years more, the history of Miriam comes to an end. She was with the children of Israel all through their wanderings in the wilderness ; but her history is henceforth merged in theirs, and we meet with her name no more till we come to the mention of her death.

This happened in the desert of Zin, in Kadesh, on the borders of Edom, very near to the promised land. Though the names are so much alike, this is quite a different place from the wilderness of Sin, to which the Israelites came soon after leaving Egypt. Like her brothers, Moses and Aaron, Miriam came near to the promised land, but never entered it. She died in Kadesh, and there she was buried.

Twice only do we find her name afterwards in Scripture. In his parting charges to the people, the year after her death, Moses made mention of her chastisement : "Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out of Egypt." And, seven hundred years after, the Prophet Micah, in the name of the Lord, spoke of her thus : "I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants ; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Thus the people were put in mind both of her mission from God, and also of her fault and its chastisement. We also are to remember both. She was highly gifted and greatly honoured ; yet she fell, and was chastised. Let us, on the one hand, watch against envy and self-seeking ; on the other, let us cultivate every talent and opportunity, and count it the highest honour to use all in the service of God.

Jael

BY REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS.

"Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite."—Judges iv. 17.

The people chosen by God in the furnace of Egypt, and led by Him through the wilderness, had turned aside from Him, and given themselves up to evil. To rebuke them the Lord allowed them to be brought under the tyranny of an alien power. Jabin was permitted to subdue them. He struck terror into the hearts of the enfeebled Israelites by his nine hundred chariots of iron, and harried them by the hand of a great commander-in-chief of his hosts, Sisera. "Twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." The wife of Lapidoth,—Deborah, a prophetess,—one to whom all Israel came for decision in difficult cases, felt this oppression most keenly. As she listened under her palm tree to the tales of sorrow and injustice her soul was stirred within her. She looked around for some one who should help at such a time. Barak of Kedesh-Naphtali seemed to her to be the only one fitted to lead a revolt. She sent for him, and he came at her summons, but declined to head the revolt unless she would go with him. To this she consented, but she told Barak at the same time that he should not have altogether the honour of delivering the people, but that the Lord would give Sisera into the hand of a woman.

One woman began this campaign, and another gave to it the final stroke of victory. Because Deborah prophesied of this grand result, and because she praised Jael as "blessed above women," it has been supposed that all that was done by Jael had the Divine approval. Certainly the action of Jael is recorded as if it were worthy to be praised, and therefore considerable and real difficulty surrounds the subject in many minds.

The battle went against the Canaanites. They were discomfited before the Israelites. Such was the slaughter, that it seemed that all the chariot-aided host were only as grass falling before the scythe-like sweep of Israel's sword. Sisera, the mighty warrior, was overwhelmed, and himself had to seek safety in flight. His charioteer drove most furiously, but the horses could not go swiftly enough for the defeated and terrified general. He knew that he was too easy a mark for the pursuing Israelites, and that their swiftest runners would hunt for him. Hence, slipping down behind his chariot, he left it to go on its way, and by its wheel-marks to delude the enemy into pursuing a wrong route. While it dashed along he sped away to take shelter among those whom he believed to be friendly towards his nation. He came towards the camp of the Kenite.

Jael, the wife of Heber the sheik, had been most anxious to know how the battle had gone, and descrying Sisera approach, went to meet him. "Turn in, my lord," she said, "turn in to me; fear not." Affrighted and weary, he was nothing loath to rest. He entered the tent, and she, giving first milk in place of the water for which he asked, wrapped him in a mantle to hide him until he should sleep. She listened tremblingly to the heavy breathings of the wearied warrior. As the sounds stole through the tent-folds she knew that he was soundly asleep. Taking a tent-peg and a mallet, she stepped softly within. A moment or two she gazes, with hatred, on the prostrate form, then, nerving herself to the deed, she lifts the hammer, and struck the tent-peg through his temples. The struggles were brief. Soon all was silence. She had killed and fastened at one fell blow the Canaanite general to the ground.

This is in brief the account. How are we to judge of it? Is it written down as approved of God? Not necessarily. It is put into the narrative as a matter of historical interest, and as being connected with the welfare of Israel. It is not essential that we should think of it as Divinely approved, any more than we think of the rash vow of Jephthah, or the vagaries of Samson or of Paul, as approved. When Deborah speaks with exultation of the act, we must remember that she only speaks in harmony with the ideas of her age.

Though a prophetess, she had but limited and local light. Christ had not come and given full light. We must avoid, therefore, measuring the character of an Old Testament saint by the standard of the New. The ethics of the Christian dispensation differ widely from those of the Mosaic. The "but I say unto you" of Christ is the reversal in great part of Mosaic morality. As also the clearer light of this age is the result of Christ's teaching, we must not judge Jael's act by present standards.

1. We cannot view with approval several things that are connected with the triumph of Jael.

(1) Her falsity of word. She told him not to fear. She deceived him by her show of kindness—giving milk instead of water, and giving it in a "lordly dish," such as would befit the rank of the general. She deluded him into imagining that he had found a place of safety in her tent. She led him to feel secure in the attention shown by her spreading over him a mantle. The wearied warrior, unsuspecting of treachery, had therefore yielded to the balmy breathings of sleep. Her words and movements were deceptive. We must not approve them, or think that the Kingdom of God can be advanced by falsity.

(2) The breach of a covenant was certainly very wrong. The tribe of her husband was under a covenant of peace with the nation of Canaan. Treaty rights ought always to be respected until lawfully set aside. Jael ignored the covenant of peace when she put the treacherous tent-peg to the temples of Sisera. She saw that the power of Jabin was broken, and that the interests of her tribe would be best served by an alliance with Israel. Hence her treachery. We are not called upon to approve this any more than we are the act of Judas who betrayed Christ, or of the soldiers who nailed Him to the tree. We know that unless Christ had died the world's atonement must have been unoffered; but then neither Judas nor the soldiers had any such intention in their act to qualify its enormity. To this day, those who seek shelter in the tent of the mother of the tribe, —the wife of the sheik,—are secure for a time. That tent is the sanctuary and refuge of those in trouble. Knowing this, as well as the fact of the covenant of peace between Heber's tribe and his nation, Sisera implicitly trusted Jael. She betrayed his trust.

Some imagine that Jael acted by Divine inspiration. No such inspiration is, however, claimed for her by the sacred narrative. Certainly it would not be in harmony with our ideas of the Divine nature to imagine that God could put into the heart of any one a conception at once so false, so delusive, and so treacherous. Sisera, if an enemy, trusted Jael; and she, being a supposed friend, was the more treacherous.

2. There are, nevertheless, certain qualities in the act of Jael that we may approve. These qualities may help us to understand why such a glaring breach of the law of hospitality, and such an act of treachery, was spoken of with such exultation. When we judge any act we must take into account motives. If Jael's act had been inspired by a desire to possess herself of the jewelled girdle or massive helmet of the fugitive commander, her act would have been simply a murderous deed. There was, however, no such motive. It is probable that her sympathies had been stirred towards the Israelites so "mightily oppressed" by Sisera. His cruelty brought a terrible humiliation and retribution. He, the proud warrior, die by the hand of a despised woman! Thus tyranny calls forth treachery, and oppression raises untameable passion. Revenge is sure to be sought by the outraged and oppressed.

(1) It was not of herself that Jael was thinking when she conceived the idea of ridding a people, to whom she was so closely related, of such an enemy. Jael had faith. She believed that Israel was under Divine care, and she wished her lot to be cast in with the chosen people. She was half a Jewess. She had more faith in God's promise than in Jabin's nine hundred chariots. Jael was animated with zeal for God. Jael was bold in her design. It required no little daring to attempt to slay such a warrior. What if her hand were too weak to drive home the tent-peg! What if he should suddenly arise, and with one blow of his mailed hand, or stroke from his sword, end her life! She was but a woman. What daring, however, she had! Women have often done deeds of daring that have equalled the loftiest reaches of manly valour. Rizzpah watched through dreary weeks the bodies of her relatives, driving off the wild beasts that would devour. Deborah led an army, and Jael slew a Sisera. For those they love women will dare anything. If a child or husband is in danger, what can keep them back from rushing to help or save? When Christ was forsaken by all, women were found clustered round His Cross. When the sabbath of restraint was past and the day of resurrection dawning, while it was yet dark, first to the tomb came women. Yes, women can be brave, and many a woman is so in a narrower sphere. That which Jael wrought was a great deed. She might with pride stand and await the arrival of Israel's chief, Barak, and say to him, "Come, I will show thee the man whom thou seekest." The word of prophecy was fulfilled by Jael's bravery.

(2) That which perhaps gave to her act greater importance was the contrast it presented to the half-heartedness of others. The indifference of Meroz and Reuben was a matter of great regret to Deborah. At first the Reubenites promised great things; but they soon began to think of the danger to their flocks and herds should a war break out. "For the divisions of Reuben were there great searchings of heart," said Deborah afterwards, when victory was perched on Israel's banners. Bitterly Meroz was cursed for the withholdment of help, but with equal energy Jael was praised for her bold deed. From her nothing was expected, and yet she acted.

(3) It must be admitted that the work Jael performed, although so faulty in its morality, was useful to God's people. Much that we may do may be helpful to God's cause, although to ourselves there will be no advantage should the motive not be pure. Let us not work evil that God may overrule it. Let us, however, have energy, faith, and zeal in whatever we undertake. Anyhow, we may learn this lesson from Jael's act. Individually, let us, with respect to evils that are around and within us, boldly, unhesitatingly strike them to the ground, and hold them there. Many a soul is unhappily held captive by various evils as firmly as Sisera by the treacherous tent-peg. Overweening confidence in self, pride, indulgent habits, procrastination, and unbelief may all be as pegs in the brow. Slowly but surely they have been driven through our natures, and we find ourselves powerless to escape. Sisera might blame a Jael for his hindrance, we have to blame ourselves.

Naomi

BY REV. JOHN N. NORTON, D.D.

"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."—Ruth i. 16.

The Book of Ruth fills a very important place in the Sacred Volume. Wedged in between the Book of Judges and the Books of Samuel, it may be considered as the sequel of the former, and an introduction to the latter.

King David was the great-grandson of Ruth, and we may, therefore, fix the date of her history at about twelve hundred and fifty years before our Saviour's birth.

A family of Israelites were dwelling quietly in their native land: Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons. As famine prevailed in Israel (a temporary trouble, which they ought patiently to have borne), they foolishly removed to the country of Moab, famous for its licentiousness and crime. It was not their purpose to remain there long, but God showed them (as He shows us also) that it is never safe to venture, even for the briefest period, within the contaminating influences of the wicked.

First the father dies, and we say, "Surely the survivors will consider this as a warning, and hasten back to Israel." No; the two sons marry idolatrous wives, and determine to settle in Moab.

Ten years flit quickly by, and again God speaks through His chastisements. The two young men are laid in their graves, and their heart-broken wives mingle their unavailing tears with those of the widowed mother-in-law, whose portion of poverty and wretchedness they are forced to share. At last, Naomi's multiplied sorrows bring her to a better mind, even as godly sorrow always works out good for the soul. She heard, in wicked Moab, "how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread."

Oh, that perishing sinners might all learn that in our Father's House there is always bread enough, and to spare, while they are seeking comfort from the world in vain!

The awakened wanderer set out at once upon her homeward way. She lingered not to deliberate and debate; she did not weigh the chances of being well or ill received, but with resolute and determined steps she "set out from the place where she was."

Well would it be if every procrastinator who is listening to me now would do likewise! No lasting satisfaction can be found in Moab. The soul must have something higher, purer, and more congenial to its tastes than the empty enjoyments of earth, and God Himself is that portion.

A family perished, not long ago, by a fire in their own house. They were not consumed by the flames, but suffocated by the smoke. No blaze was visible at all, nor could any alarming sign of fire be discovered from the street, and yet death came as effectually upon them as if they had been burned to ashes. Thus is sin fatal in its consequences, few being destroyed by outrageous forms of it, flaming up with lurid glare, but multitudes perishing by the stifling smoke of indifference and spiritual slumber.

Oh, thoughtless hearer, do you regard the soul as your meanest possession, that you can consent to keep it in constant jeopardy, by remaining out of the fold of Christ? "The mirth of a maniac dancing in his chains; the joy of a child at the burning of the greatest treasures that manhood has ever acquired, is reasonable and provident in comparison with the levity of him who, convinced that there is but one suitable, and that as yet an unattained good, comes to the investigation of it with drowsy powers, and with thoughts dissipated and lost in the crowd of worldly vanities."

One reason why the awakened sinner will not rise up without delay, like Naomi, and depart from wicked Moab, is the absurd impression that he must do something, first, as a preparation for such a step. He imagines that he must mourn and suffer much before he can return to God in peace. Will months and years of mourning and suffering add anything to the efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice? Can we make ourselves better, in the least degree, before we come to Him for pardon?

The sincere penitent, who sets out on his return to God, does not wish to go alone. Andrew finds his brother Simon, and brings him to Jesus. Naomi would not willingly leave her widowed daughters-in-law in the land of idolatry; and even while appearing to discourage, she really designs to draw them onward with herself toward the more favoured borders of Israel. She honestly speaks of the difficulties to be encountered, because she has no wish to deceive; but the inference is plain, that she greatly preferred that they should go with her to the land of her fathers.

So should all Christians feel with reference to those who may be influenced for good by their example and importunity.

Lord Peterborough, speaking in his flippant way of a visit which he made to Archbishop Fénelon, observed, "He is a lovely man; and I was forced to get away from him as fast as I could, else he would have made a Christian of me!"

May God help all of us to exert such an influence among our fellow-creatures!

Naomi, and her widowed daughters-in-law, set out on their journey. Orpah seemed quite as sincere and determined as Ruth, and no one who observed them, as they advanced toward the border-line, between Moab and Israel, would have suspected that either of them would falter or turn back.

Alas! how many who start with stout hearts, on their journey toward Immanuel's Land, stop short in the way! The allurements of the world entice them aside; the pleasant and profitable companionship of religious friends is given up; and, sad to say, they wilfully "draw back unto perdition," after having made no inconsiderable progress in the Heavenward road.

The three lonely, unprotected women pursue their weary way. Naomi, while she sets the example of hastening onward toward the land of Israel, ceases not to remind her more youthful companions that she can hold out to them no tempting prospect of worldly gain. She entreats them to count the cost of leaving, for ever, their nearest kindred and friends; and, in order to test still further their sincerity of purpose, she kissed them with

tears of tender affection, and bade them go back to their home. And thus does the Lord Jesus test and establish the faith of His followers by reminding them, beforehand, what course of conduct will be expected of those who look for the everlasting rewards of Heaven as a return for a brief service upon earth.

Our three travellers of Moab, meanwhile, are proceeding on their way, and, as yet, Naomi knows no difference between her companions; Orpah occupying as warm a place in her affections as Ruth. In like manner, God's minister, who cannot read the heart, and knows not who will prove faithful, and who will turn back to the world, encourages all to come forward and enlist.

By this time, the three friendless women have reached the dividing-line between Moab and Judah. Before them, bathed in genial sunlight, is the pleasant land where God's people dwell, and where His righteous laws are honoured and obeyed.

Behind is Moab, where worldliness and wickedness prevail.

Here, at this border-line, poor, foolish Orpah discovers the real purpose of her heart, and she cannot consent to forsake her native country and its tempting delights. She embraces her distressed mother-in-law, in a long and final farewell, and turns back to the idolatrous land she had left.

Is there not always some young person who, at an approaching Confirmation, when companions and friends are passing over, with joyful anticipations, into the blessed region of safety and peace, will go back, like short-sighted Orpah, to the follies which he had been almost persuaded to give up?

You may, indeed, return to Moab, and seek for happiness in the pursuits and pleasures of the world. You may make light of the claims of religion, and keep aloof from the necessary restraints of the Church. You may even doggedly resolve to forget, for a season, that you must soon die, and answer for your neglect of the means of grace at the bar of final judgment; but your hour of sorrow will speedily come. When troubles pour in upon the anxious soul, like a sweeping flood, and all earthly joy is darkened, you will call to mind, with unavailing regret, a journey which you once felt disposed to undertake, but from which, through timidity, or foolhardy presumption, you turned back.

Let it not be supposed for a moment that Naomi and Ruth were indifferent as to the miserable choice which foolish Orpah had made. The separation was most painful, and they gave way to uncontrollable grief.

So, too, do Christian friends mourn over those who refuse to journey with them toward the land of everlasting life and often will they look back, with glistening eyes, to discover whether the thoughtless brother or husband or child has not repented of his rashness, and set off in earnest pursuit.

Are you standing, this day, my young friend, like Orpah, halting between two opinions, looking out, with satisfaction, upon that happy region where God's people dwell within the safe enclosure of His Church, and yet powerfully drawn back toward Moab? Take warning while you may, and make good your escape. It is no presumption on the part of any of you to think of passing over the border-line which separates the world from the fair inheritance of God's children, because He invites and entreats you to do so. In courts of law, when a man is called as a witness, no sooner is his name mentioned than he begins to make his way forward, and no one thinks of asking, "Why is he pushing his way through the crowd?" And even if such a question should be put, the brief answer would suffice, "My name has been called!"

In like manner, if the devil is whispering to any timid soul this day, "It is folly for such a sinner as you are to think of receiving Baptism or Confirmation," you can turn the arch-deceiver to inglorious flight by the magical words, "My name has been called." "The Saviour has called my name."

"There is nothing I feel more than the criminality of not trusting Christ," said Dr. Hengle, of Scotland, on his deathbed; "nor trusting Christ, without doubt. Oh, to think Who Christ is, and what He did, and for whom He did it, and then not to believe Him, not to trust Him!"

Here we lose sight of poor Orpah for ever. She had gone back to her people and her false gods; and we leave her to her deplorable fate.

In marked contrast with this melancholy instance of an unwise and sinful choice, we have the beautiful example of Ruth. She is a representative of the noble band of the youthful servants of the Lord, who have come to a true decision, and she speaks most persuasively to the young who are present now.

To her, Judáh was a strange land, and all her associations bound her to Moab; but she was convinced that higher obligations called her to forsake earthly ties for a holier companionship. Even now, Naomi, although abandoned by Orpah, would not suffer Ruth to cross over into Israel without well considering the step she would take. Her resolution, however, was too firmly established to allow her to retreat, and she cried out, in the passionate words of the text, "Whither thou goest, I will go . . . Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!"

Will not some of you make a like dedication of yourselves to the service of the Most High?

Naomi, having thus fairly tested the sincerity of Ruth, "left speaking unto her," and the two devoted women journeyed joyfully onward toward the delectable mountains.

Many of your familiar friends, who have been invited, as you have been, to embrace the privileges of the Gospel, in the ordinances of Christ, are about (in spirit, at least) to repeat the declaration of the determined and noble Ruth, and it is a very serious question for you to settle, whether you will not do likewise. You are quite as able to endure the fatigues and privations of the journey toward the better land as those who will actually set out upon it; and you should remember that if you fail to start for Heaven, you will never reach it. Nay, more, the very means of grace which they will receive, are freely offered unto you; and you need them!

Remember the teaching of the Sacred Word. All who "believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God," received Holy Baptism; and upon all who had been "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus," the Apostles, Peter and John, laid their hands in Confirmation.

Come, come to the ordinances of God, with the believing hearts of little children, and the promise which is to you, and to all that are afar off, shall certainly be made good,— "I will receive you; and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Nelson, the brave English Admiral, could not see the signal for suspending battle, because he placed the glass to his blind eye; and man cannot see the truth as it is in Jesus, because he has no wish to do so.

The Divine Redeemer has sent you His offers of salvation to-day. May He have no cause to say of any here, in words of sorrow and reproach, "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life."

Naomi

BY REV. WILLIAM BRADEN.

"Then she arose with her daughters-in-law," etc.—Ruth i. 6—18.

It is a common saying that "troubles never come alone," and more than one sad heart has cried with David, "All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over my soul." Indeed, whatever be the cause, Both evil and good appear to have their times and seasons in human experience, when in a strange, mysterious manner we prove that "unto him that hath shall be given, and unto him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." When prosperity comes it often multiplies its blessings with marvellous rapidity; so also when sorrow enters the home, the shadows grow deeper and deeper until the light of life seems to have disappeared for ever. In this story we have an illustration of that unexplained fact. Naomi's household has been desolated three times by the ravages of death, and there must be yet another change—the home is to be broken up. A husband's death is often the signal for such a bitter severance. It is natural and inevitable, for is he not, as the word implies, "the houseband"? Do not its safety, unity, and strength depend on him? I know it is not always so, and but for the toiling patient wife the home would be broken up by the dissolute habits of the man who is no true husband. Yet many will understand Naomi's experience—widowed by death, change has followed, furniture has been sold, the house let, the farewell uttered, and they have gone back to their friends, or found a new house, which they can never call home.

Let us look at the resolution of the three widows (vers. 6, 7). News has reached the country of Moab that the harvests are plentiful once more in Bethlehem, or, to use the

beautiful expression before us, "the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread." Divine Providence, you perceive, was distinctly recognised in those old times. People then believed in God and His perpetual working in the world. If they beheld the fields glowing with the ripened beauty of golden corn, they thankfully exclaimed, "Behold this is from God." If disaster and famine arose, they mourned in sorrow, saying, "God hath shut His bountiful hand, for we have sinned against Him." Some men suppose that in these days we are wiser and more philosophical, because we think and talk more of the immutable laws of Nature, and less of the immediate power of God. Satisfied with an attempt to trace second causes, they aim to reach no higher. In truth, from the speech and actions of would-be scientists, we might imagine that God has now nothing to do with the upspringing of the corn, or the temporary affairs of His creatures. If the harvest is abundant, there is exuberant congratulation at the increased skill of our agriculturalists, and if disaster threaten the crops, we are told with a sneer that prayer will not remove it. Without entering into any discussion on the difficult and vexed questions involved in this practical atheism, let me be content with affirming that I believe that God is unceasingly operating through all the multitudinous laws of nature, which are but His methods of working, and that I cling to the old faith with passionate earnestness and deepening satisfaction, that faith which declares that from the Father of light "cometh every good and perfect gift." As we gather in the earth's ripe fruits, we may declare, "It is not by our industry, our skill, our watchfulness that we are thus enriched, but the Lord hath visited His people in giving them bread." Naomi having heard the glad news, prepares to return to the old country, and the two younger widows determine to accompany her, and so obey the impulses of a sincere and tender affection.

Here allow me to digress to say a word about mothers-in-law. This is a theme most attractive to the unmarried cynic, and is very popular with every pretentious witling who imagines (poor deluded creature!) that he is a splendid satirist. It is extremely easy to excite laughter by some poor silly jest at mothers-in-law, but such mirth is wonderfully cheap. In certain circles it is taken for-granted that the contraction of such a relationship is one of the undesirable but inevitable penalties of matrimony, as though that relationship were always necessarily an obnoxious one. We protest against the false assumption. No doubt, the position is a most difficult one to sustain, and needs great endowments of wisdom, forbearance, and love, especially where the mother lives with her married children. There is danger of contention arising from the most natural causes. For instance, both mother and wife (to speak only of one aspect) have claims on him who is husband and son. The one remembers how she has watched and cherished her boy since infancy, and consequently feels that she still retains some authority over him and his affairs, and is, therefore, often ready with her suggestions that have in them a tone of command. But the wife feels that she has her rights, rights over her husband and authority in his house; interference, therefore, in domestic matters she will not tolerate, and she is jealous of any person interposing between herself and husband. Here is the difficulty. If the mother-in-law will intermeddle, contention will follow, and misery to all concerned. If there is a warm temper on one or both sides, then woe be to the peace of that house. But, on the other hand, there are some beautiful exceptions to this picture—more numerous than many suppose. Instances where prudence, charitable judgment, and patience predominate, where the mother forbears to assert authority and the daughter is not suspicious, where they work in loving harmony, the one ready without undue eagerness to help where needed, the other gladly receiving advice and assistance without a morbid jealousy of interference. Happy is the household that is in such a case!

The mutual affection of Naomi and her daughters-in-law is a sweet model for all who occupy similar relationships. She herself bears expressive testimony to Orpah's and Ruth's filial and wifely love, in the words, "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me"—there were no complaints to make, the past was an unshadowed picture of happy home-life. Now, with all this it seemed impossible they should separate; the very grief they suffered in common intensified their love. Death that removes this one and that, also knits those who remain into a closer relationship. It heals long-standing differences, and heart leaps to heart in the common sympathy of tears and trouble, and love for the dead. Over the cold form we repent our hatreds, and renew our loves. Death is a great sanctifier of all human relationships. These three sad-hearted women realise this, and so resolve still to cling to each other and to set out together on their journey for Bethlehem.

The next scene (vers. 8, 9) gives us the portrait of a disinterested mother-in-law. Having travelled some distance, Naomi's unselfish nature manifests itself. She knows that the presence of Orpah and Ruth will be a source of intense comfort to her solitary condition; she is old and needs all possible helps, but her sense of justice and love towards these young warm-hearted women will not allow her to reap any advantage at their cost. It is no sign of friendship to draw others into any calamity for our comfort's sake, however much they may press it. Bear the burden bravely alone if it be possible, and do not crush another heart, though it plead with generous sympathy to share the load. With thoughts like these Naomi stops in the road back to Bethlehelem, and urges her companions: "Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband." The mothers of these two youthful widows are still living, and it is natural that in their lonesome condition they should seek shelter with them. Naomi has nothing to give but her blessing, and that with exquisite tenderness and deep meaning she now utters. Ah! when mothers-in-law will thus freely testify of their sons' wives, it is evident that duty has been nobly fulfilled, for they usually set up a high standard by which their conduct is to be tried. This blessing, which is the sweetest praise, springs from an instinctive conviction that God rewards us according to our treatment of others. As we measure love or hatred, so will it be meted out to us. Those who are unfaithful and harsh at home have no warrant to expect prosperity. But of this we may be sure, that no act of kindness, even to nearest relatives, no self-sacrifice, involving weariness and pain, remains unknown to that God Who jealously gathers up the memory of all noble deeds, and He Who "sees in secret" these silent works of love, will one day bestow the open reward. It is gloriously true that we lose nothing, but we gain immeasurably, by spending the heart's best treasure. The somewhat fascinating inducement Naomi holds out to these young women is that by returning they may soon be happily married again. It is not right that their life prospects should be ruined by devotion to her. You see this woman did not share the scruples of those people who, before they are bereaved of husband or wife, rigidly denounce second marriage as unnatural, and tell us that it betokens short memories and shallow grief. It is remarkable what strange conversions in this matter are wrought by time, but these should make us more cautious in uttering hasty judgments against our neighbours. Naomi believed that it was right for these widows to wed again, and in beautiful, unselfish love she bids them go back where the prospect of another marriage is greatest. "Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept." But this renewed proof of affection only binds them to her with stronger ties. They cannot part thus; both sturdily resolve, "We will return with thee unto thy people." Such love is a chain not easily severed. What can that perplexed and generous woman do? Doubtless her heart yearns for them to remain with her, but justice to their future interests will not permit this. She therefore urges other powerful reasons to dissuade them. "And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters; why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have a husband also to-night, and should also bear sons, would ye tarry for them till they were grown? Would ye stay for them from having husbands?" To our ears this reasoning sounds strange, but it is founded on a law common among the Jews. It was this: If a man die, leaving a wife but no children, his brother or next kinsman shall marry the widow, and "the first-born" of this marriage "shall succeed in the name of the brother that is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel." No family was to become extinct. Had, therefore, Mahlon and Chilion left unmarried brothers, it would have been their duty to take Orpah and Ruth for wives. But there were none, and could be none, and even if Naomi should marry again and have sons, it was not to be expected that these two young women should wait twenty years, and refuse all other offers. The facts are put honestly before them both; there was no prospect of domestic happiness for them in Judah; it would be all sacrifice and no comfort. I honour Naomi for such plain, open-hearted speech, shaming as it does so much of our delusive, uncertain talk. Truth in all its naked simplicity is infinitely preferable to any promising falsehood, however gorgeously attired. If our friends and neighbours have no other right which they demand from us, they have this—that we should never cheat them with plausible lies. Whatever comfort you may forfeit by telling the truth, it is your duty to tell it, and face all consequences. There are times

when self-interest will plead hard, and sometimes personal affection, bidding you repress uncomfortable facts, as, for instance, when you are taking a partner into a not over-prosperous business, or urging a woman to become your wife, when there is small prospect of home comfort. It will tax all your manhood to be candid; but be resolutely true, and then, whatever the future brings, you will not have the results of a lie thrown in your teeth.

The test in the story before us is a severe one; the outlook towards Bethlehem is very gloomy, while behind in Moab there is hope. If the young women hesitate, we shall not wonder; for human nature prefers ease to anxiety, the comfort of a well-stored home to the poverty of single life. Rather than remain unmarried many a young girl has given her consent to an offer when all the impulses of conscience have warned her against it. We can appreciate the feeling which has made her shiver with dread at the thought of a lonely life; but the sin itself cannot be excused. The heart that declines prospective comfort to fulfil present duty is a brave, noble, and God-fearing heart.

At this juncture, Naomi becomes almost despairful in her sorrow, and her voice changes into a slight murmur—"For it grieveth me much, for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." She does not say that this hard discipline is punishment for her sin, though that may have been her thought. The great lament is, that others share with her in the consequences. It is a fine nature this woman has: she could endure anything for herself, if her friends escaped. That is the spirit of true womanhood, all the world over!

Still she does not forget that her sorrow is of God's sending. It comes not from an enemy, or the world, or bad luck, or wild chance, or the devil, but from "the hand of the Lord," the Father Who loves tenderly even while chastening, Who is "too wise to err, too good to be unkind"; and so she can say in resigned meekness, "It is the Lord's Will; let Him do as seemeth Him good."

It is impossible to read those broken pitiful words, like a moan from a riven heart, and not to be moved by their pathos; and what could be more natural than the effect depicted by the story—"They lifted up their voice and wept again"? Look at that sad group of three tearful widowed women standing in the highway debating this question, Shall we say farewell or not? Is it not a scene for any painter? No, not for *any* painter, but for one whose soul can sympathise with womanly grief, and whose hand has skill enough to portray that pathetic mingling of sorrow and love. How he would sketch the varied expressions in those faces! Naomi with eyes full of eager entreaty and lips quivering with pain; Orpah moved to weeping, yet perplexed, wondering what decision to make, and casting a glance ever and anon back on the road they have come; Ruth standing, grasping her mother's hand, with unwavering resolve in every line of her face and attitude. It is a sacred moment, an hour of suspense, on which depends a future that no prophet's eye hath discerned. What is to be the result of that controversy of love?

The decision is given in a few words of matchless simplicity—"Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her." That is all. There is no angry dispute, no bitter feeling in the mind of any one of the three, and we feel not unkindly even towards Orpah herself. She does only what she is passionately entreated to do; she weeps sadly and takes her farewell with a kiss, loth to part. It would be folly to accuse this young Moabitess of wanting in love to Naomi, nor can we affirm that she was one of those persons whose friendship lives only in the sunshine of prosperity. Hers was not a summer love, that grows and fades with the flowers. It was a sincere affection, but she lacked the courage to face and to endure all that discomfort and loss which Naomi's words so vividly pictured. She was persuaded, as Bishop Hall says, "to return from a mother-in-law to a mother in nature, from a toilsome journey to rest, from strangers to her kindred, from a hopeless condition to likelihood of contentment. A little entreaty will serve to move nature to be good unto itself."

Yet in her determination we can discover a warning. She renounced her former resolve, she was "as a reed shaken with the wind." Evidently a woman given to generous impulses of feeling, but without strength of character to sustain her in them. Some men and women are warm-hearted, passionately affectionate, and will give their very selves to you in a moment of excited sympathy, but they have no stability, they have a sensitive hatred to suffering, they will never make martyrs for any cause. Orpah was one of these; very good, but unreliable. Well, we must take people's natural dispositions into account either in trusting them, or judging of their actions. Con-

sequently we have to make a considerable discount in estimating the value of certain protestations. One man speaks with splendid vigour, declaring, "Though all forsake thee, yet will not I"; and it sounds sturdy enough, but when the *test* comes he sits in shamefaced silence or denies his former profession with a curse. Professions are like bills: you judge their worth by the names they bear, the firms by which they are issued. Some you would not accept at any price, and others you are sure will involve a composition. It would, however, be well for us all to guard the door of our lips, carefully saying less than we intend to perform, knowing that that man is trusted most who makes the fewest professions and does the best work. To this I add that we must give account of our words. God hears and remembers them all.

The contrast in Ruth's conduct must be dealt with in a few words. "Ruth clave unto her." Orpah's example and further entreaties from Naomi have no effect upon her determination. She is prepared for poverty, for long widowhood, for exile from home and country, for all that shall follow faithfulness to her mother-in-law. Comfort was not the main consideration in life to her. Her resolve is no empty vaunt, sincerity rings in every syllable of it. Beautiful, noble-minded Ruth! Out of such constant self-sacrificing natures as thine our heroines, our best Christian women, our martyrs are made.

Ruth

BY REV. ISAAC KEELING.

*"Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods," etc.—
Ruth i. 15-18.*

I consider that these words contain the germ of the whole Book; which certainly would never have been written, if what the text states had not taken place, as a part of the life and conduct of this holy woman.

Ruth's sayings anticipate some of the remote results of the course she was pondering. She looked far beyond the passing day. The plan of life which her few resolute words so vividly told, was avowedly formed for *life*—for all time and for all eternity. We thus have occasion, from the text itself, to enquire how it fared with Ruth, through that great future she saw in her mind's eye, when she said, "Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

The sayings of Ruth lead us to consider—Her critical situation, her solemn decision, and the blessed results.

I. HER CRITICAL SITUATION.

When Ruth and her sister-in-law, Orpah, set out with Naomi, on the way from the country of Moab, to Bethlehem in the land of Judah, it is likely their first intention was only to accompany her for a convenient distance, and then to bid her farewell and return to their home and friends. But when they halted for the purpose of parting, it seems they found in their own hearts a strength of affection for Naomi, beyond what they had been conscious of. They then proposed to go all the way with her. Against this she reasoned with them, on the common principles of worldly prudence. Orpah was prevailed upon; kissed her mother-in-law, and departed.

"*But Ruth clave unto her.*" Then Naomi said, "Thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law."

At this point, let us look at the situation of Ruth; the circumstances amidst which she was making up her mind.

1. As to the time then passed in her own history. There can be no doubt that this would then and there be re-produced, before her mind's eye in rapid review.

She had been connected by marriage with a sickly and declining but pious family of Israelites; to her a foreign race: her own nation and relatives were idolaters.

The father-in-law, her husband, and his brother had died, after ten years' residence in her country. When they were removed, it was natural for the childless widow, Naomi, to look with dislike on scenes in which all she saw spoke to her heart of losses which nothing earthly could retrieve; hence her determination to return to Bethlehem. She had come to the land of Moab in a time of famine; and "she had heard in the

country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread." A Jewish commentary (the Chaldee paraphrast) says concerning her sons, "because they transgressed the word of the Lord, and joined in affinity with a strange people, therefore their days were cut short." It is remarkable that the names of the two brothers, Mahlon and Chilion, are said to have signified, respectively, sickness and consumption.

It is probable that by that time this family, of strangers and sojourners, was in sore poverty. In Judæa they were owners of land. In time of famine they had sold their land, when land was worth little, and food was at a famine price, until the next year of Jubilee, hence the right of redeeming it from the purchaser or his heirs. They had come to the land of Moab for bread. There the decaying house had been wasted by sickness and death; and had doubtless grown poorer. How many touching scenes, of suffering, and sorrow, and tenderness, would Ruth remember, when the question was—whether she should part from Naomi, or go all the way with her.

2. As to the probable future. In the case of her persisting to accompany Naomi, she had no encouraging worldly prospects.

She was likely to share the poverty of Naomi, who appears to have acquired the unpleasant habit of complaining; a habit which repels instead of attracting sympathy. Likely, as Naomi pointed out to her, to remain a childless widow: likely, also, according to the course of nature, to survive Naomi, after witnessing her growing infirmities, and watching her dying hours; and then to be left, a lonely and disconsolate stranger, far from the scenes and the friends of her early years; and at last, to be herself *dying alone*, unattended, unbefriended, in a strange land.

3. As to the time then present. When she halted with Naomi in the way, she had the example of her sister-in-law, and the arguments of her mother-in-law, in favour of going back to Moab and *its gods*.

It is somewhat startling to find Naomi advising Ruth to go back to her people, and *their gods*. But we may imagine, with some probability, the possible motives of Naomi, for urging Ruth, at least *in words*, to return with Orpah: I say, *at least in words*. She might have a prudent fear of the possible murmurings of a daughter-in-law, poor and discontented; and might be therefore guarding herself from any words, on her own part, which could afterwards be cast up to her, as having persuaded Ruth to share her distressed condition. But her mention of the *gods* of Moab suggested views entirely opposite to her direct expressions; views which might perhaps become more strongly suggestive by some peculiar pathos in speaking, some tone or cadence which filled Ruth's mind with solemn memories, and perhaps recalled her best thoughts of the departed. She had been favoured with opportunities to know something of the faith and hope of this Hebrew family, and might have seen in the wasting lives and dying hours of Elimelech and his sons, something of the nature and blessedness of even infirm and wavering piety, such as theirs seems to have been. She had been enabled to estimate their religion, in comparison with the vain and wretched idolatry of her country; and had the means of being convinced that *Jehovah alone was God*.

Her situation made some choice needful and inevitable. It seemed to say—as to either alternative,—*now or never!* But it did not, on worldly principles, point to the choice she made.

II. HER SOLEMN DECISION.

In these impressive circumstances, doubtless under a gracious influence from the same Lord Who, long afterwards, opened the heart of Lydia, Ruth, chose Naomi, the aged, dejected, poor, complaining widow, for her sole companion and friend, quitting all others; leaving father and mother, to go with her to a country she never saw; to lodge with her, though in such a cottage as a poor widow might occupy at Bethlehem. During their companionship in long continued and severe family afflictions, the hearts of Ruth and Naomi had been trained to feel deeply and to sympathize strongly. They had watched and mourned together, for the same lingering and departing sufferers. They shared together cherished sorrows and endeared remembrances. They had learned to know each other in the house of mourning. Naomi seems to have thought she did well to be querulous, and her habitual complainings must sometimes have been wearisome; but Ruth seems to have had a considerate generosity in judging; prepared and disposed to prize solid worth amidst wants and infirmities.

Under the same gracious influence which then prevailed in her thoughts and feelings, she chose Israel, the Church of the living God, the *people* in covenant with God, for *her* people; finally leaving her own country and nation.

In connexion with the cherished hope of Israel, which was the hope of a glorious incarnate Redeemer, she chose Naomi's God, the Lord Jehovah, for her God: Jehovah God All-sufficient: the all-pervading, all-knowing, ever living Being: "Whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting." Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

Farewell to Chemosh, and all the idols of Moab!

Let us look at the *sentiments* which appear to have actuated Ruth in making, avowing, and keeping her *choice*.

Ruth made her choice *affectionately*.

Personal and family attachments appear to have been made instrumental towards the awakening and enlightening of her conscience, and the developing and strengthening of her religious affections, as motives to consideration.

She avowed her choice with characteristic firmness: expressing a settled and unalterable purpose, that she might put an end at once to all attempts to dissuade or hinder her. It is not in a spirit of hesitation or compromise that a great and real change of mind can be wrought out, and practically maintained. All attempts to reconcile the world to holiness, by half-measures, will fail. Thoroughness and straightforwardness in the path of duty, are really easier and safer, than any of the most plausible and cunningly-devised middle courses. The weak compliances of those who think to shew their moderation, by halting and wavering, near the boundaries of right from wrong, will always be used to the hurt of the wavering soul. To the invisible powers who wield the weapons of temptation, such concessions to worldliness, will be as the joints of the harness through which Ahab received his mortal wound; but the bow will be drawn, not at a venture, but with cruel clearness of aim. Is there not reason to fear that many are lost for want of the conscientious firmness, that is habitually prepared to give a prompt and full denial to all pleadings about *more* or *less* of sin.

Ruth made her choice *solemnly*; fortifying her resolve and avowal, by calling to mind the most moving and awful considerations—her dying hour, and her belief in divine judgment and retribution. "Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." She strove to make her choice final and irretrievable; presenting it to Naomi and herself in the most impressive form. She acted like that ancient commander who, entering an enemy's country from the sea, burnt his ships, that his soldiers might be led to think, *not*, how shall we escape; but, solely, how shall we secure victory? She speaks not as one entering upon a doubtful enterprise, or trying an experiment; but as one who looked forward to the end of all things,—as anticipating effects throughout her own everlasting being: not as having a month's mind to religion, but as choosing, once for all, for all time, for all eternity, by a well considered and irreversible decision. The danger of trusting in our own resolutions is often very justly urged on grounds of religious prudence; but the danger really lies in forgetting or neglecting the charge,—*"Trust in the Lord, with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding."* Nothing great, or even safe, can be accomplished in the concerns of the soul, *without* strong resolutions, made and kept in the fear of God, and in humble reliance on His guiding eye and succouring strength.

In the crisis of Ruth's case, we see the proper characteristic strength of a feminine nature, developed by the influence of the affections, and, through *Grace*, resulting in sublime foresight and invincible determination. Ruth seems not to have been aware that she was acting with a glorious greatness of mind, but in the supreme judgment of the Divine Spirit, Who is the primary author of all Holy Scripture, she did that day an everlasting deed, which deserved to be had in perpetual remembrance. Learn hence whom the Lord delighteth to honour.

III. HOW IT FARED WITH HER THROUGH THAT GREAT FUTURE SHE PONDERED, WHILE SHE HALTED ON THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM, AND WAS MAKING UP HER MIND.

1. She gained her immediate object. There was an end of objection and remonstrance, on the part of Naomi. "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking to her." John Foster remarks, in substance, that it is sometimes amusing to see how the space clears around a man, when those who would willingly embarrass or obstruct him, but are unable to crush him, perceive in his conduct the signs of a strong and persevering resolution. In such cases, opponents who are not very much in earnest, shrink from the protracted toil and difficulty of their

foreseen task, and give up from weariness. And the thoughtful moralist, Johnson, advises those who discover that their system of life has been wrong, to change it at once and entirely; without trusting to delusive plans of moderate and gradual reformation. He who deliberately intends only *moderate* amendment of life, is not sincere and thorough in hatred to sin; and he who calculates upon *gradual* change from bad to better, forgets the enthralling influence of habit. These poor and spiritless schemes will fail, and deserve to be defeated. "The Lord preserveth the simple."

2. For some time, Ruth found her chief reward in her own good and kind feelings, the friendship of Naomi, and a solemn gladness of heart, in serving and pleasing the true God. These, however, were great and precious realities, sweet recompenses, the better part,—far more real and valuable than those outward and visible signs of the profit of godliness, which are often chiefly regarded and recommended. "Doth Job fear God for nought?" This cavil of the accuser of the brethren, was like most of his temptations; a falsehood founded on a fact: a malicious imputation of refined and far-seeing selfishness to Job, on the ground that Divine Providence had so guarded and prospered him, as to make his personal godliness plainly and eminently profitable. But Ruth had commenced her decided course in the spirit and practice of sacrifice; and with motives widely apart from selfish calculations. She had repelled views of worldly prudence; and made her choice on spiritual grounds.

3. For a season, her constancy was well-tried. She shared the poverty of Naomi to a degree, which, to a selfish and haughty spirit, however romantic, would have been intensely mortifying. They arrived in the beginning of barley-harvest; and so real was their poverty, that it was quite a valuable consideration for these two poor, godly women, to obtain as much corn as one of them might be permitted to glean after the reapers in the harvest-field. It was Ruth's own humble and cheerful proposal. She said to Naomi, "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." She had the greatness of mind to be not ashamed of poverty and labour. And she continued to glean "to the end of barley-harvest and of wheat-harvest, and dwelt with her mother-in-law."

4. But by swift steps her worldly state improved.

The difficult stranger who, as this book says, had "left her father and her mother, and the land of her nativity, and had come unto a people she knew not heretofore," found among the Israelites of Bethlehem, a friendly and open-hearted people, who were kind to her in her poverty, rejoiced with her when better days came, and admired and commended her virtuous behaviour.

In a few days after the two harvests, a course of events took place,—approved by the national law and by the system of manners among the Israelites at Bethlehem,—which in fairness should be regarded from their point of view, and tried by their standard, rather than by modern laws and examples. These events wrought a great change in the condition of Naomi and Ruth. Naomi sold her land, in the manner required by the law and practice of those times concerning the redemption of estates of inheritance. The poor widow, Ruth, became the wife of rich Boaz;—a good, religious, respected and amiable man; a prince by descent; and, as the simple phrase of those days describes him, "a mighty man of wealth."

The childless daughter of Moab became a mother in Israel; an ancestress of the long line of the kings of Judah, David himself being her glorious great grandson.

She, the alien and foreigner, who had chosen Jeremiah for her God, obtained what the daughters of Israel earnestly desired, and the hope of which was intimately combined with their general wish for offspring; an honourable and eminent place as a mother in the sacred line of the promised "seed of the woman," of whom the wonderful child came, the mysterious Son of Man, and Son of God, "Who is over all, God blessed for ever." Rom. ix. 5.

She who, in choosing to follow Naomi, seemed likely to pass away into oblivion, and leave none after her to cherish her memory, will be for ever remembered; and is one of the only two women whose names are prefixed to books of the Holy Scriptures; being in this way peculiarly distinguished by the honour that comes from God. Wherever the Bible is read, it extends and preserves the memory of Ruth. Concerning Mary of Bethany, Jesus said, "Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." Thus the act which Judas censured, but Jesus approved, was rewarded with an everlasting fame, which is, in a manner and degree pre-eminently marked, the honour that cometh from

God. Ruth, like Mary, had "chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her." And that Spirit of Grace, by whose Divine influence, Ruth was enabled to choose in faith and in the spirit of sacrifice, has so set the seal of his approbation to the principle of her decision, as amply and signally to fulfil what was spoken to her, as a poor gleaner, by the kind and pious Boaz. "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee, of the Lord God of Israel, under Whose wings thou art come to trust."

Above all,—as by the avowed principles of her choice, Ruth confessed her trust in that incarnate deliverer, who was the cherished Hope of Israel; and as she persevered through discouragements and difficulties, with exemplary fortitude and humility—virtues more naturally and closely connected than is usually supposed—we have no reason to doubt that she died as she had lived, still trusting in the promised Redeemer, and thus "abiding under the shadow of the Almighty."

Ruth and Boaz

BY MOST REV. WILLIAM ALEXANDER, D.D.

"They came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest."—Ruth 1. 22.

You will not expect from the preacher a meagre abbreviation of the beautiful story of Ruth. It seems to me that a preacher who would attempt anything of the kind would act like one who, standing on the outskirts of a forest, and had seen the glory of the wintry sunset gleaming through the branches, should then take a few dry sticks from the trees as a specimen of the glories he had seen. I assume that you know the beautiful story of the Book of Ruth, and I shall only attempt to draw some of the chief moral and spiritual lessons which appear to me to pervade it.

I. In the first place it seems to me that the Book of Ruth exhibits to us an eternal law of God's Kingdom. I mean that, in the worst and darkest times of the Church, God has had His own people. We are led directly to this law by the objection which has been made to the story of the Book of Ruth, that such sweet and genuine piety is utterly inconceivable in the dark and stormy times of the Judges. But if you bear in mind the truth that the very purpose of the Book of Judges is to trace out the law of retaliation, and to show how national sin is connected with national punishment, you will see why such narratives of exceptional piety like that of Ruth should be excluded. But there is a more satisfactory answer in the fact that ever since God had a Church on earth true spiritual religion has never been utterly extinguished. Faith can always say with the Apostle that there is "a remnant according to the election of grace." When God's holy dove is driven from cities and the abodes of men, that bird of sweetest note can be heard singing in remote places, even in dens and in the clefts of the rocks.

And consider for one moment how this law has been exhibited from time to time in our own Church of England. Take the reign and court of Charles II. There are many who will remember that wonderful picture of the last Sunday in the Church, when the gallery was filled with boys, singing lewd songs, and the King was to be seen playing with a group of dissipated companions. Yet even here the life of Mary Godolphin was hidden with Christ in God. She walked through the fire, and there was not so much as the smell of it upon her raiment. Even here she lived according to rules simple and direct, and which many would find as useful in a London suburb as they were to her.

Or, again, when we come to the Georgian era, and light upon certain histories written as if in vitriolic acid. No doubt there is enough darkness about them, and we light upon clerical slanders rather than upon the souls of men being cared for, and of dioceses being superintended. Yet even at this distant period there was one on whose face men saw a glow. Bishop Butler was sent to preside over the see of Durham, while in remote places of England there were men of the stamp of the Wesleys. The soil may be ever so rank, the spiritual atmosphere ever so unwholesome, but still the Apostle's words remain, "His seed abideth"—abideth in him that is in God. Never has the Church been so dead but that the voice may be heard which said of Sardis, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk before Me in white, for they are worthy."

Now, brethren, of this great law, the survival of holiness, we have a beautiful instance in the Book of Ruth. You will observe that the Bible in this respect differs from

all our preconceived notions. History, it is sometimes said, is a pall covering dead men's bones; but at least it covers them gracefully. The king shows off gracefully in the hands of some great master of the art, so does the statesman who claims for himself a sort of divine right of always acting with the majority. As we frame history it is all perfect and sublime. It should be a passing on of saints and martyrs with a cross on their shoulders, and a crown on their brow, to the throne of glory. But as God has framed history, how different it is! Its every page is stained and blistered—stained with blood and blistered with tears. And of this feature in Old Testament history, the Book of Judges is an example. The divine narrative closes with a sigh. "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Now, over against all this stands the Book of Ruth, in which the characters are drawn in simple life. An air of truthfulness and reality pervades the book. In support of this I need only remind you of the beautiful language of Naomi with regard to Ruth herself. I find a German critic saying that "Ruth is not a marked character." But is that a real objection? What is the truce and high ideal of woman? Is she simply a thing of nerves and bones? Is it for her to wash the wounds of pain, or to minister in old age, and in deadly sickness? We entwine the memory of a woman dear to us with sickness and suffering relieved.

Ruth embraces the true religion with her whole heart. Boaz sees that she has come to put her trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel, not a young proselyte caught by those who entrap her. She comes with a whole heart, and that heart a broken one. She is the type of the Gentile Church, she is the firstfruits of that great multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and tribes, who have been drawn to the Cross. Then you notice another thing after Naomi has addressed her daughter-in-law; "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her." We all know how much these little gushing tokens of affection mean in sweet-mannered women. Truth, propriety, affection, these are the old combined virtues that formed the character of Ruth.

Then we have Boaz. There have been times when the young have needed encouragement, and it is well to encourage those even who are growing old. The voice of a philosopher reminds us that the work of the world is done by the young, that the golden decade is between thirty and forty, that men as they grow older become lost to enthusiasm and to faith. Now the words of Boaz have a Bible tinge, and his memory is haunted by Bible echoes. "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Think of that beautiful service in the harvest-field! It is no exaggeration to say that someone might come into this Abbey, and when the last light of day is stealing through the clerestory, when the priest says, "The Lord be with you," and the choir responds, "And with thy spirit," you may catch the echo of words once spoken during the barley harvest of Bethlehem."

II. We may learn a lesson on the law of social life. There is throughout the Book a constant reference to the Levitical law. There is the "goel," the redeeming kinsman. But I wish you specially to observe the beneficence of the law. I wish that some who speak of the barbarous character of the old law would take their Bibles and read the 18th chapter of Leviticus. You will there see that God ordained that a position should be reserved for the poor and the stranger. The law gave a measure of wealth to the indigent. It solved in this way one of the most terrible problems of our modern society. While it did this there was an ample margin left for the exercise of private charity. The corner of the field was defined to mean a portion that in modern language would have been a poor-rate of fourpence in the pound. It was not a system of outdoor relief, for the Book of Ruth shows us that there was great delicacy to be observed in giving. There is a difference between the alms you fling and the present you give. And thus there is a moral even in children's presents. But I think it should be observed in favour of the old Levitical law that this England never found out till the reign of queen Elizabeth the difference between the pauper and the vagabond, the difference between misfortune and crime. Depend upon it, as the spirit of the Old Testament works, the bitter taunt will become less and less true that England is a paradise for the rich and a purgatory for the poor.

III. There is an Evangelical law connecting this book of the Old Testament with Christ Jesus our Lord. Perhaps, in modern times, we have heard too much of Ruth as an idyll, and too little of it as a sacred book of the inspired canon. We have been called on to see her as she appeared to the poet Keats, too little as she appeared to

St. Matthew linked in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. We cannot dispense with the genealogies of the New Testament. They do not consist simply of long lists of difficult names, but contain something far beyond. Over and over again, in some layer of the soil, the naturalist finds traces of animals now extinct, yet give him one vertebra, and he will form the entire structure. So these names, which may at first appear only cold petrifications, only want an interpreter to start them into a new life. I need not remind you that Bethlehem is connected with history and prophecy again and again. In Psalm xxxii. 6, 7, we seem to hear echoes from the old Church, singing "Venite adoremus." Then there is that old strain again in the beginning of the Book of Micah, and you will remember it in connection with the histories of Saul and the death of Rachel. Yes, and in Bethlehem was the birth of Him Who made it the most celebrated place of all except Calvary. As we hear of Bethlehem what do we think of? Of the mystery of the Virgin's womb, of that true humanity which was born there, like unto us in form and feature, like us in all but sin, and by the mystery of that Holy Incarnation each one may find pardon and peace.

IV. Lastly, we learn the law which pervades the life of every true believer. The Book of Ruth may be an idyll, but it is an idyll seen in a Divine light. Those two boys that have been taken from the widowed mother early—have we never seen one in middle life like Naomi, with her hair flecked with grey, and who, when she speaks, can but say, "Call me not Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me"? No doubt the history is given us because it is a specimen of the Divine guidance of the believer's life. We may learn that our lives are not random things, and that there is no such thing as chance about the Christian's life. This story of Ruth, like every story of the highest sort, would lead us to perfect trust in Him Who wants His own dear children to lift up their hands to Him when in darkness. They must wrestle in the darkness before they can face the sunrise. God seems to keep silence when we pray. We ask, and God seems not to give us the things for which we pray. Ah! but He gives us far better. There are some here who may pray for their Mahlon and Chilion. They may have asked for the life of their children, and God answered the prayer by giving them a long life—even life for ever and ever. And some Ruth here has prayed for one dearer than life, and he has gone down in youth and beauty, and now the grass waves over him, for God has taken him. And then, as time has gone by, she has found a refuge under the eternal wings, a home that shall not pass away. Amidst all weariness she can sing—

Be the day weary or be the day long,
It leadeth at last to even-song.

Barzillai

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"*Barzillai the Gileadite.*"—2 Samuel xix. 31.

The river Jordan, in its course from North to South, forms a deep channel, which completely divides the country on the West from that on the East of the river. On the West lies the main part of the land of Israel, the ground rising on that side to the low rocky hills of Judah and Ephraim. On the East the ground rises to a much greater height, to the upland pastures or downs of Gilead, and to the mountains of Ammon and Moab. The country on this side is a high table-land, not level but broken up into wavy downs, and crossed here and there by ravines through which mountain streams hurry to join the Jordan. It is covered with rich pasture, and in some parts with forest-trees. This is the country which so attracted the cattle-feeding tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, by the richness of its pasture, as to lead them to desire of Moses that it might be allotted to them as their possession; there accordingly they were settled, separated by the river Jordan from the rest of the tribes, the Northern part, the land of *Gilead*, being given to Machir the son of Manasseh.

Between four and five hundred years after this, we find Barzillai one of the principal chiefs of that country. He is called "the Gileadite," and is described as "of Rogelim." He was therefore probably of the tribe of Manasseh, and he seems to have dwelt within the borders of that tribe, but not far from the River Jabbok, a mountain stream

flowing into the Jordan, and forming the boundary between the tribes of Manasseh and Gad. He was "a very great man," rich in all the wealth of those times, one of the principal men of the land.

When King David was driven from Jerusalem by the rebellion of Absalom, he fled in this direction, crossing the Jordan with such of his people as remained faithful to him, and establishing himself at Mahanaim. This place seems to have been near to Rogelim, where Barzillai dwelt.

Though forced to flee, David still had with him some thousands of followers. And now they found themselves without supplies, far from all their resources, in what was to them a foreign land. Rich in pasture as the country was, it could not support this sudden influx. Probably indeed the people were forced by their numbers to spread themselves beyond the cultivated parts, for they are described as being "hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness."

And now Barzillai came to the help of his king. Three neighbouring chiefs joined together to supply his wants; one was a foreigner, Shobi the son of Nahash, of Rabbah of the children of Ammon; the second was Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar; the third was Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim. These three, we read, "brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat; for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness." The list is a long one, and doubtless the quantity was large, for a great number of people was with David, and the provision for their daily wants was no trifling matter. Yet all was sent without stint, and without payment. Barzillai was probably the nearest to the king of the three, and, though mentioned last, he certainly gave as much as any, for afterwards he is spoken of alone as having "provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim."

Thus far therefore Barzillai stands forth to us as an example of a loyal subject, cleaving to his king when numbers forsook him, and not only so, but giving liberally for the supply of his wants, even when his fortunes seemed at the lowest ebb. Thus he proved himself a loyal subject, a bountiful giver, and a friend in adversity; and the stamp of God's approval is evidently upon him for this.

God, Who has placed us in our various relationships to one another, requires us to be faithful in them all. It is more than a mere political obligation, it is a Christian duty, to "honour the king," and to submit ourselves to rulers and to ordinances; we are to do this "for the Lord's sake." However the case may be in extreme and exceptional instances, under ordinary circumstances the Christian's duty is plain; to be submissive, dutiful, loyal, and faithful. In this case the path of duty was clear; so plainly was Absalom's cause the wrong, and David's the right, that in remaining faithful to David, Barzillai showed faithfulness to God also.

Barzillai knew how to give. True, he was rich; but riches and liberal giving are not always found together. Barzillai gave liberally and ungrudgingly, and not once or twice only, but as long as the need lasted. He was "a cheerful giver," and he was also "not weary of well-doing." Loyalty and friendship have claims on us, which must never be neglected; but God calls us to give, and to give cheerfully, in many quarters. The hungry are to be fed, the naked to be clothed, the ignorant to be taught, the ungodly to be reclaimed. There are works of mercy both for the body and for the soul, and both at home and abroad, which call for liberal and constant help. The need never ceases; let the help too never be wanting.

When the rebellion was ended by the death of Absalom, David was recalled to his throne by the voice of the whole nation. He left Mahanaim therefore, and went down to the river Jordan, with all his people, on his way back to Jerusalem. He was met from the other side by great numbers of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; and, together with other preparations for taking him home in triumph, "there went over a ferry-boat" (an unusual thing, it would seem, in those days,) "to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good." Thus met from the other side of Jordan, David was also accompanied so far by those who had entertained him on this side. "And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan."

And now followed what was very natural. The king would not lose sight of his aged and faithful subject. He who had proved a friend in need should now go up with King

David to Jerusalem, and reside at the king's court as an honoured guest. "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem"; such was the king's invitation.

"And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live," etc.

Time had been perhaps, when the proposal would have pleased Barzillai greatly; in his younger days, when life was before him, and spirits were high, and the eager desires of youth were felt in all their force, then it might have seemed a tempting proposal, that he should leave the pastures of Gilead and go up to Jerusalem to lead a court-life, and mix with the greatest of the land, and perhaps rise high among them. It is plain that Barzillai was no stranger to such feelings, for such was the course that he wished his son Chimham to enter on. But for himself he had now no such desire. It was too late for him to enter upon court-life. True, the life at that court was doubtless simple, compared with the splendour and luxury of the courts of later times; yet it was a very different life from that which he had led so long on the uplands of Gilead. He had no longer any wish, or any fitness, for such a life. He was now an old man, fourscore years of age, and thus beyond the power of receiving much enjoyment from outward things. Doubtless, the treatment he would meet with at Jerusalem would be all that was good and honourable: but what was that to one who could no longer discern between good and evil? The fare at the king's table was more delicate than that rude plenty out of which Barzillai had provided for him at Mahanaim: but Barzillai could no longer taste what he ate or drank. And though at Jerusalem there might be such music as Gilead could not furnish, and though in the worship of God inspired psalms might there be chanted by trained and melodious voices, yet what was all this to one who could hear no more the voice of singing men and singing women?

He would be no burden to the king; he would not cast upon him the care of a helpless old man: so Barzillai put the case. He would go a little way with the king, to show his duty and affection; he asked for nothing in return, either for that or for what he had done at Mahanaim. "Why," asked he modestly, "should the king recompense it me with such a reward?" All he desired was to go back in peace to his home, to spend there the short remainder of his days, there to close his life, and there to be buried beside his parents. His time was but short; with him life was almost over; his old home, with its pastoral quietness, would suit him far better than life at court; there he could better collect his thoughts, and put away the world, and await the great change.

Thus it was settled. The king did not press his proposal. Barzillai went over Jordan with the king and his people; then "the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place."

Barzillai

BY REV. WILLIAM ROMANIS, M.A.

"I am this day fourscore years old."—2 Samuel xix. 35.

Here is a man just stepping forward out of his obscurity into the light of a momentary contact with an illustrious character, and then stepping back into obscurity again; like a half-seen figure in the background of a picture; a man who does nothing great or striking, a man with no before or after to bespeak or retain attention; a man, as you might say, with no history. And therefore, a thoughtful man will add, from that very reason not without interest to us men of no history. Here was a man who had lived through the troubled times of Saul and his foreign and domestic wars, through the reign of David and his difficulties of many sorts, (he was eighty years old,) to all appearance in quiet and prosperity, doing his own business and prospering therein, for he was a very great man, or, as we should express it, he was very rich: here was a man loyal and peaceable in the midst of much that was contrary to loyalty and peace, yet in no prominent position as a defender or employé of royalty: a good subject, a good citizen, able and willing to supply the wants of the king and his followers in their distress, "he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim." There is nothing in all that is told of Barzillai to give us an impression of any other than a commonplace sort of person, living in a common way, such as multitudes have always lived in, richer perhaps, but in other respects no more distinguished a person than the bulk of us here.

Now let us see how he appears in this little incident which only makes his name known to us. David, on the point of crossing the Jordan on his return to Jerusalem, now that the rebellion of Absalom was at an end, out of his warm and princely gratitude to a subject who had stood by him in his need, invited Barzillai to go to the capital with him. The king said unto Barzillai, "Come thou with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." Barzillai received the invitation not in any spirit of stiff-backed independence, which refuses to receive a kindness though it be in payment for a kindness conferred, nor in scorn as lightly valuing any inducements the king's offer might be supposed to hold out; he simply declined it as not suitable to him, in the circumstances in which he was, to accept, as not worth while, and therefore not such as the king himself, on reflection, would wish him to accept; he said unto the king, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old, and can I discern between good and evil (*i.e.* of course, pleasure and the absence of it)? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men or singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?"

In a word, Barzillai was old and knew it. Earthly enjoyments, anything of place or power or gratification which a king's court could give him, had no longer any zest for him, his capacity for such things were past, and he knew it. He was alive to all things that he was bound to live to, to duty, courtesy, loyalty, liberality; to the last he was ready to shew the affection of a subject to the king, "Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king," but he sought not life among things dead to him, he would neither seek to rekindle extinct desires and enjoyments, nor affect them when he felt them not.

Common-place this was, no doubt, nothing over-wise, nothing that the worn-out moral and prudential maxims of all times and peoples have sought to express: yet is it actually, in practice, so universal? Is it so very common among men, when they are old, to know it? when the time has gone by for such and such occupations, or such and such enjoyments, to know it, and acquiesce in it, and straightway, as far as the power of action is allowed them, to act on it? No surely, the facts are common, universal, there are no exceptions to the laws which bring them forth; not so the recognition, the appropriation, the embracing of them and shaping what remains of life by them. This quiet unpretending personage steps just this once across so illustrious a path as that of David with a message to him and to all, as valuable as many of the messages David himself bore to mankind: a message for common as well as for uncommon souls, of universal application, a message which bids all partakers of this transitory life of man to recognise the past, the lost, the bygone, as past, lost, bygone; a message bidding us know, at every successive stage of life, from what sources in which happiness may once have been innocently and lawfully found, it is now no longer to be sought; a message of the same kind, though it spoke of lower things, as that which must have been inwardly borne to the spirit of the king, when he changed his fasting and weeping for the sick child into utterance of resignation over the dead, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"; or when, at this very time, the agonised cry of that fatherly heart, "O Absalom, my son, my son! would God that I had died for thee, my son," died away into silence.

Yes, this is wisdom, this quiet answer of Barzillai, it is true wisdom, for it is the recognition and the self-application of God's order of our earthly lives, as He in His love and wisdom hath laid it down for us.

We know nothing at all of Barzillai, before this incident. We should have to draw on imagination for any characteristic of his earlier life. Yet surely an old age so calmly bright throws back something of light on the years that were passed. We may pretty surely guess of some things that were not in them. He could have been no grasping, grinding money-hunter, rich though he was—no sensual man, or niggard, or pushing, or profane—who so calmly and courteously, yet decidedly, and with so good reasons decline the king's offer, and wish to turn back again and die in his own city, and be buried by the grave of his father and his mother. Pleasure, and its intervals of its own sort of weariness,—eating and drinking, singing men and singing women—could not have made up much of the life of one who so calmly recognised their passing away.

But especially is this consideration of importance to those who must make the bulk of any congregation, the middle-aged. Middle-life it is which, from the great energies

it is putting out, and the manifold relationships into which it has usually entered, is most particularly giving the character to the old age which is to follow. From middle-life the character passes on without a break,—who can point out the frontier-line between them?—to old age. “Between youth and age”—I quote the words not of a divine, nor a philosopher, but of a busy trader, much mixed up to the last with active work, “there is a wall of partition, which a man does not observe till he has passed it. The transition is generally made in middle-life, but passes unnoticed amid the necessary cares and occupations of one’s calling. All at once a man finds himself, as it were, on an eminence, and sees much that is varied and cheerful beneath and behind him. This is a decisive moment for the soul; for now arises the question whether he shall give himself entirely to God and turn away from the world, not with contempt, for it has been his training-school, but with a glad contentedness, or whether he shall again mingle with the many things that should be left behind, and thus become not only a transgressor, but a laughing-stock to superior intelligences. Generally, when a man has passed through the season of wayward minority, and stands erect in manhood, he asks himself, What means all this? His reply must be, All below is vain and fleeting; true joy and peace are only to be found in spiritual life. I have done many things, and perhaps well, but where is the fruit of the blossoms that looked so promising? Alas, the ideals have disappeared; but not the faculty of labour, and therefore, clothed with humility, I say, Forward, to suffer and to do! This is to become a master in the business of life; but it is vain to expect that this can be attained without passing through an apprenticeship and the years of the journeyman.”—Such an apprenticeship, such journeyman years, are we in middle-life going through; with what result? Such a master of the business of life, though we know nothing of his apprenticeship, can we discern this aged Barzillai to have become; with such “glad contentedness” was he able to turn away from earthly things.

I say glad contentedness, for they are surely mistaken who see anything mournful in his words; there was nothing here of “the sear and yellow leaf”; he showed one sort of vigour while he disclaimed another; with all the dignity of self-respect, with the courtesy of a true gentleman undervaluing not the king’s offers but his own service to him, with the prudent love of a father for the son whom he recommended to his kindness, having outlived nothing really belonging to the true character of the life of man, he returned with the royal kiss and blessing, master of his own will, to his own place. What consolation he carried home with him we know not, but we may be sure he was without none which belonged to his time and country, and certainly the age in which any portion of David’s psalms were composed could not have been poor in assurances that God would not forsake them that sought Him, when they were grey-headed! Whatever his thoughts, thoughts of death we see were not absent, and, it may be, mingling placidly with them, returning memories of childhood, when he spake of dying in his own city and being buried by the grave of his father and his mother. Surely, whether in anticipation or in memory, both behind and before, he had within him what well replaced lost capacities for common enjoyment, for eating and drinking, for the voice of singing men and singing women!

That there are some among us like Barzillai, contented to let what will go by go by; ready to do what it still lies in their power to do; calm, cheerful, though to any proposal to re-enter life’s enjoyments or occupations they would answer, How long have I to live that I should do so?—that there are such persons among us is certain. We most of us know some. That their life, if not calmer, is greatly higher and more Heavenly than that of Barzillai’s could have been, is equally certain; for they have a clearer knowledge than he could have had, they walk in a closer link than he could have walked in with Him, Who hath promised “even to hoar hairs He will carry them.” I will not presume to disturb the veil that hangs before the life of such, which experience alone could with seemliness draw aside. Let us only look to it, let us only seek so now to walk, so now to pray our Father for guidance, that the last stage of our journey may be like theirs.

It is also certain, and most sorrowfully so, that there are those who furnish a painful contrast to anything like this. Aged men and aged women are to be seen, tightening their poor feeble grasp of what must slip away from them, seeking still to discern between the good and evil of life’s pleasures, listening for the voice of singing men and singing women which they can no longer hear, looking behind, not before. May He Who calleth labourers into the vineyard at the eleventh hour call them.

Others are in neither of these cases. This is a matter, we know, into which physical

facts greatly enter. There are those who have no old age, cut off before their time. There are those whose old age is so affected by bodily suffering or weakness, or by the decay of faculties, that they are only partially able to realise their state and only partially able to attain to its blessed calm. And perhaps this is what we all ought to expect rather than otherwise for ourselves; it is most common; with most the real falls far short of its ideal. Well, beloved, He Who though He lived to no old age on earth, though He wore not the crown of thorns over gray hairs, yet by the indescribable power of His sympathy took the sicknesses and bare the infirmities of the whole life of man, will not scorn or cast us off for that. He will be our help and comforter even in such case. We shall not find Him wanting, however varied be our needs. Only let us walk with Him now, let us respond now to His invitations which He utters with the foresight of our coming burdens, yea let us mix Him up with our thoughts, purposes, desires. So whether we have to walk young, middle-aged, or old, through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, He will be with us, His rod and His staff they shall comfort us!

The Disobedient Prophet

BY REV. J. C. COGHLAN, D.D.

"It came to pass as they sat at the table," etc.—1 Kings xiii. 20-22.

The fate of the Prophet of Judah has always been deemed a hard one. That it should be so is by no means surprising. We should certainly expect so striking a punishment to have been inflicted upon a very different kind of person. And it is that very circumstance which makes it the more important that we should look into the case. Let me first say, as best I can, what is to be said for the Prophet. Jeroboam had established idolatry; religion was to him what religion is to many statesmen at the present day, a power to be used for State purposes. Jeroboam had numbers on his side: he had novelty on his side. Except God, it is not easy to say what he had *not* on his side. But one can see the king, the following, the gorgeous ceremonial, the golden calf; and one cannot see God. Well, the Prophet, who was eventually executed, was sent by God to denounce the king, to denounce him publicly. Think of this. It cannot be pleasant to denounce anyone, least of all a king, especially under such circumstances. Thinking over my Right Reverend and Reverend Brethren, and thinking over myself, my opinion is that a mild remonstrance in some far less difficult case would be difficult even to the highest ecclesiastical dignitary. He possibly might venture, as he could get no higher, and could be sent no lower; but even in his case favour counts for something. In the case of any of us below him, opposition to royal or popular wish—still more, opposition to both, and that expressed at the moment of its triumphant self-assertion—would be attempted by few; and I should say that every one of the few would be thought mad by his friends and by the public. Yet the Prophet of Judah did this. You may say that the Prophet knew that he could perform miracles, as he did afterwards, and that, therefore, it was easy for him. How did he know that he could work miracles? Surely by the very same faith which caused him to go on his most dangerous mission. Let us suppose that he felt himself secure in the conviction that he could escape personal injury by the exercise of miraculous power; would that make his courage under the circumstances less than that of an archbishop, bishop, or clergyman of to-day, who should feel called upon to rebuke the Sovereign, knowing that the British Constitution secured him against arbitrary punishment? If you be sure that the royal command, "Lay hold on him," will do you no harm, and that the hand put forth to emphasise that command will be immediately paralysed, it makes no practical difference whether you expect that effect to be produced by miracle or by law. If you say, "He was told by God to go, and so he could not do otherwise than go," I answer, It comes to this: he knew somehow that he ought to go—it is nothing to our present purpose by what means he knew; whether Gabriel or his conscience told him does not touch the question. He followed what he believed—and as we know, rightly believed—to be God's guidance in the performance of a most difficult and dangerous duty. Do you mean to tell me that because he was sure that it was duty (for that is what it comes to) it was therefore impossible for him not to perform it? Do you do what you know to be your duty, even when it is

much easier than his? I maintain, then, that the work assigned to the Prophet was much more difficult than any parallel work would be to any of the clergy of to-day, because the miraculous protection on which, doubtless, he relied was a matter of faith, and the constitutional protection on which we should rely would be, so to speak, a matter of sight. The man of God, in faith and with fearlessness, fulfilled his most trying mission. He so far brought Jeroboam to his senses that he asked the Prophet to entreat the Lord for him, and, in consequence of the Prophet's entreaty, "the king's hand was restored him again." What a triumph for the Prophet! He might at such a moment divest himself of anxiety; he might suppose he had no more to think of; he had done his Lord's bidding, and wrought miracles by his Lord's power. But no; he is not even now thrown off his guard. The king asks him to come home with him and refresh himself, and promised that he would give him a reward. Translate this: to dine with the sovereign, and to be sure of immediate promotion—a deanery, or even bishopric. The Prophet did not forget himself or the Divine commands even now. He lost a great opportunity; and I have no doubt that, if he had ever got home, his friends would have called him a fool, and would have shown him, of course, how much good he might have been the means of doing by making a friend of Jeroboam; that he might have converted the son of Nebat, put an end to idolatry, or, still better, have brought the precious idols to his family and friends, who would have imagined themselves to be thankful for the success of his mission, when they were really delighted at his having brought home even one of the golden calves! But "the man of God said unto the king, If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the way that thou camest." He declined the hospitality of the king, and refused to receive a reward. He rejected promotion. Assuredly this was no ordinary man.

We should be disposed to say that when he was so collected and obedient under such trying circumstances, he was safe. Very likely he thought so too, as he rode home and pondered over the events of the day; and no wonder if he did. Try to forget his end, and see him at this point going quietly home. Think of what he had done, what he dared, and what he had sacrificed; and say, do you not admire him? I do. Say, do you know many who would do likewise? I do not. "Oh, yes; but he disobeyed after all," some one may say. Doubtless, I answer (still trying to say what is to be said for him), but it was not for filthy lucre's sake; there was no prospect of reward, popularity, promotion, royal favour, no worldly inducement whatever. Nor had his reflections caused him to forget the Divine commands, or to think that, having refused the king's hospitality, he was more free. No; for when the "old Prophet went after him, and found him sitting under an oak," and asked him to come home with him and eat bread, he told him at once, as he had told the king, that God had forbidden him so to do. Then why did he go? He went from no mean or sordid motive. There can be no doubt about that. He went because a man who could truly say, "I am a Prophet also, as thou art," told him that an Angel spake unto him by the word of the Lord and commanded him to bring him back. This was plainly his real motive. What other could he have had after refusing Jeroboam?

Again (still speaking as his advocate) I ask you to remember that he performed the really essential part of his mission. He failed in a trifling matter, and that under very trying circumstances. He fell into a snare into which most men would fall without anything like the excuses which he could offer. And with all these points in his favour, you would be unprepared for the announcement that for going home with the old Prophet the punishment of my client was death!

To sum what may be said for him, it comes to this: (1) He fulfilled faithfully the essential part of his mission; (2) His trifling transgression was excusable considering the plot laid to deceive him; and (3) In any case his punishment was extreme in severity.

In replying to the case made for him I must begin with this last point. In thinking of the severity of the punishment, I have no doubt that we unconsciously infuse into our thoughts the assumption that the Prophet of Judah was damned—suffered eternal death—because it was deemed necessary to execute him. As to his future state we know nothing whatever. No doubt at the great day his destiny will be settled, not by one act, but by his life. You and I have done many acts much worse, and have not been cut off. We do not expect that any one of them will decide our endless future. Why should we think so in his case?

Of course, if you believe that the soul at death goes direct to Heaven or to hell, you may say that the "disobedient Prophet" was all the better for his failure in one point, if his whole life were right; that he was "taken away from the evil to come"—that he was saved (perhaps) many years of anxiety by being thus slain. Even so, his execution may have been a warning to others, and God's design may have been to strike with awe those who needed some such lesson. "It is the man of God," said the very same Prophet, who brought him back by lying to him. "It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion." The whole story went abroad then as it would go abroad now; but then the death, the execution, would strike, impress, teach, and warn men; and they would, I fancy, not think much or think at all about that future life about which we think. Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel; but rewards and punishment hereafter were no part of what was revealed by the law of Moses; so that the death and no more, I should think, would have struck the ordinary Jew of the time. But if the soul (or the self) does not go direct to Heaven or to hell, if it be neither in a state of probation nor of purgation, but simply unconscious between death and the Day of Judgment, and if there were years of happiness before the Prophet, from which he was cut off, even though he went to Heaven at the last, did he not suffer a loss? This is full of "ifs"; but I have quite as much right to suppose all this as popular tradition has to suppose the opposite.

"But he fulfilled the essential part of his mission." Even supposing that we could so far enter into the Divine mind as to say what is essential in any command, known to be such, and what is not: still it is plain that there may be a wide difference between that part of the Divine command which was the more important in, so to speak, its missionary and public aspect, as regarded Jeroboam, and that part of it which regarded the Prophet personally, and would be the more likely to try him. But surely, setting aside all thought of religion, we know that "trifles" lead into serious evils, and are often the turning points of life as well as the tests of principle. And, as men of the world and men of honour, we shall admit that the importance of a principle does not depend upon the importance of the thing to which it is applied in some particular instance. You decide upon a man's dishonesty, not by the magnitude of his fraud, but the fact. When once we receive, no matter how, what we believe to be a Divine command (and this was the Prophet's case), it is plain that we have no right to decide how much of it God meant to be attended to, and how much we may set aside as immaterial. You will recognise and obey the parts of the Divine law which forbid murder, theft, lying; perhaps you will recognise and obey those which enjoin prayer, while you ignore those which speak of the Sacraments. By what authority? "Do this in remembrance of Me," is a Divine command, if anything be; and yet many who would break none of what are known as the Ten Commandments, break this one habitually, and, as far as one can judge, without self-accusation of any kind; certainly with none such as a breach of the sixth, seventh, or eighth commandments in the decalogue would cause them. Why? Because they settle—unconsciously it may be—what is essential in the Divine commands. They obey precisely so far as they decide obedience is important, and set aside the rest. In other words, they obey themselves, as Saul did. To God they are essentially disobedient, as he was.

The disobedient Prophet, however, was certainly not to be placed in this category. He disobeyed under very peculiar circumstances, no doubt; but how readily he disobeyed! There were, as he might have thought, two antagonistic Divine commands. He was told not to eat bread or drink water in that place, and he was told to do it. It was his duty to weigh them, and he did not. He had, on the one hand, indisputable evidence of the prohibition to himself, confirmed by the miracles which he had been empowered to perform, and by the strength of resolution which had enabled him to refuse the offer of Jeroboam's hospitality and reward. What had he on the other side? The mere statement of another Prophet, who asserted that an Angel directed him to annul the attested command. He was in no wise bound to listen to the old Prophet; he got no sign from him; he asked for none. He let go his faith and fell into credulity.

Here, then, is the case of no vulgar sinner, no habitually high-handed or thoughtless transgressor of the Divine law, but one whom we are justified in regarding as a man of pre-eminent virtue, honoured by the King of kings by being chosen to discharge a difficult and dangerous duty, and supplied with minute instructions. The difficult and dangerous part of his mission he performed; he even so far discharged the seemingly

less important part as to refuse the royal invitation. The crisis, as we should naturally think, had been passed. But it was not in the great matter, but in the small matter that he was tried, and that he failed; as he who has escaped perils of waters over thousands of miles of angry ocean, sometimes is drowned in the narrow unrippled river, within sight of home.

It is not in the hour of persecution only, or of open and obvious peril that we need to be on our guard. We often brace ourselves for that. It is in the smaller occurrences of life that we need to be careful and watchful unto prayer, if principle be involved. And in how few things is it not involved, after all? The thought, doubtless, suggests danger in these "small things"; but does it not also invest them with dignity? Does it not raise them out of the dust? What can be small in action or in suffering by which the character can be tested and the soul tried?

The Prophet of Judah being dead, yet speaks, and what he says in death is not less important than anything he ever said in life. Nay, perchance, much more important, because he warns of their error those who may think themselves not tried at all because their life has been marked by no striking event, their heart bruised by no crushing sorrow, their days clouded by no chronic woes.

More important, because he warns those of another kind who have gone through what they may have deemed their last fiery trial, that they may after all be doomed but to look upon the land of promise, into which they shall never enter; that their trial is not yet over, their warfare not accomplished. More important, because he everlastingly echoes and emphasises the Apostolic injunction, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

The Old Prophet in Bethel

BY REV. J. C. COGHLAN, D.D.

"I am a Prophet also as thou art," etc.—1 Kings xiii. 18.

Nothing could be much worse than this. I turn to it to-day, because when I tried, in a former sermon, to deal with the case of the disobedient Prophet, I did not touch a difficulty which arises to some minds, from the belief that while the deceived was punished the deceiver escaped. To this point then I must address myself before I can show the helpfulness of this case in self-examination.

I do not propose to account for the deceiver's escaping punishment. I deny that he escaped. We are all agreed that he deserved punishment; and if I be right, he received a very severe punishment indeed. We leave the story as, no doubt, the beholders left the scene, impressed by the sight of the dead Prophet who had so remarkably distinguished himself that very day; and think of the living Prophet only to wonder how he had escaped, almost to wish that the abstinent lion had found in him a prey. "Imagination," it has been said, "is necessary in the study of history." We must try to throw ourselves into the circumstances. The sightseers "went home" and the Prophet "went home." An idea of sameness is conveyed by the word "home." But to what different homes did they go? I have no time to open out this thought now; but whether the "homes" of the other spectators were happy or otherwise, free from care, or full of care, we may assume that they for the most part differed from his. He was thought of and talked of as a desperate character, an accomplished hypocrite, who had told a dreadful lie, caused the death of the friend he had induced by a falsehood to be his guest, and had gone home unpunished. That was the style of "talk" about him in all the homes. The theme of conversation, perhaps of surprise, was that he was not punished. But was he not punished? He was not visited by immediate death. But was he not punished? To what kind of "home" did he go? I do not mean outwardly; for, I suppose it was precisely what it had been the day before. But, inwardly—to you or to me—is "home" the same merely because walls, furniture, fire, outward surroundings or contents of any kind without life, or even with life, are the same? Of course not. I do not say, because I do not think, that there is no such thing as sentiment about inanimate objects: and I do not envy the man, if such an one there be, who cannot understand such sentiment. I only say that the position of the man in the material home is not, so to speak "a fixed quantity."

You open your door. What is inside you—your thoughts, your conscience, your forebodings, settle the character of “home” to you more than what is inside the four walls generally known as your “home.” If there be anyone here who knows this, and knows what I mean, God forbid that I should tear up his feelings by giving examples. And if there be anyone here who thinks that I am “speaking parables,” God forbid that I should interpret them. It is most likely that life will interpret them for him. Unless it be necessary, I pray that it never may. Nay, rather, I am sure that it never will; for I am sure that our Father never did, never does, never will allow one human tear to be needlessly dropped.

I want to “torment before the time” neither the experienced nor the inexperienced, but merely to draw the attention of both to the obvious fact, that to the old Prophet and to the gazers upon the scene, that day and thenceforth “home” had not the same meaning.

Well, the old Prophet went “home”—to the material home of the day before—nay, of that very morning. Was it the same home? and, if not, why not?

To begin with the lowest motives. Let me translate it: He was a Prophet. He occupied a prominent position, and he had a character to lose. The latest commentators, I know, have tried to run down his character because he stayed at Bethel, while we learn from 2 Chron. xi. 16, 17, that “such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, quitted their homes and came to Jerusalem,” says the commentator, “came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers,” says the Scripture to which the commentator refers. What evidence is there that the old Prophet did otherwise? He was not bound in any way to reside at Jerusalem. But let us suppose that he did stay at Bethel to keep well with Jeroboam; let us imagine him a thorough-going, unscrupulous “trimmer”—which I think altogether a false conception of his character—still, surely, Jeroboam was not the man who would fail to note the fact that this Prophet who wished to stand well with him had told a lie.

Taking the lowest view of him, then, when he went “home” he took with him this thought—that, when Jeroboam heard the news of that eventful day, he would say to himself, “I may make use of that old Prophet, but I must always remember in our intercourse that he has told a lie.” Even though you suppose him to have been a trimmer, was detection no punishment, and when he went “home,” was “home” the same when he took into it the consciousness of detection, and the conviction that he had irretrievably fallen in the estimation of all who knew him? Make him as bad as you will, and say, was he not punished?

But think of a good man—for we must look at it every way—think of a good man who would have left Bethel if he could—although not obliged to leave it; think of him suddenly tried, suddenly falling, suddenly finding that he had caused the death of a brother whom he had never intended to kill, that he had killed him, and by a lie. Make the case your own. Would not “home” represent a new (and painfully new) idea to you as you returned? The old Prophet had, thenceforth, to live on with his conscience, which he could no more escape than he could overleap his shadow. He had to live on with a remembrance which was grievous unto him, and therefore with a burden which was well-nigh intolerable. This is not mere assumption. His conduct justifies the belief that he was by no means thoroughly bad, that his conscience was active, and his sorrow sincere. He might have got out of the whole affair easily enough. When the report of the man slain by the lion reached him he might have held his tongue, instead of saying, “It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord.” He might have stayed at home instead of rushing out to connect himself with so disagreeable an occurrence. Thoroughly hardened characters are not usually prompt to identify the corpse, which they have been instrumental in making a corpse. His sons had no way of knowing that their father had brought back the Prophet of Judah by lying unto him. If they heard of the Prophet’s declining Jeroboam’s invitation, and his reason for it, they would naturally have thought that the invitation of their father—a brother Prophet—was another matter. They could not have proved his lie even if they had suspected it—which is highly improbable. “But,” you will say, “they heard his prediction as they sat at meat. Therefore they would mentally connect their father with the matter.” Well, supposing they did confound sign and cause, what then? What did their father foretell? Did he foretell his brother’s immediate death? No. Did he foretell his violent death? No. Did he foretell his death at all? No. What did he foretell? Simply and solely that he should not be buried with his fathers.

The old Prophet's entire conduct after his lie leads us, I think, to form a good opinion of his general character before. The mere fact of his being a Prophet, of course, would prove exactly nothing. The possession of supernatural gifts no more implies moral or spiritual excellence than the possession of natural gifts. Either may be abused. Balaam and Judas Iscariot had supernatural gifts. So had also members of the Corinthian Church whom St. Paul warned against their abuse. So also had St. Paul himself, who feared that he might be a "castaway."

I take this old Prophet as a man, on the evidence before me. I believe him to have been a worthy man, with a sensitive conscience; who had a sudden—perhaps a single—great fall, of which the immediate cause was thoughtless desire to show his power, or that professional envy and jealousy against which priest and Prophet, ancient and modern—quite as much as their lay brethren—have need to "watch and pray."

If I be right about this old man, who had this terrible moral fall—who had done something which he could not "live down," although he had to live on—I ask, Did he escape punishment? Did David escape punishment, altogether beyond the death of his child, altogether beyond the ever-impending terror, "the sword shall never depart from thine house"? Can we not read what he suffered in many a Psalm tinged with sadness or even saturated with sorrow?

But, setting aside things spiritual, need I prove to any man of honour that life with a reputation irremediably blighted by one unharmonising act, the result of some influence, unaccountable, unsuspected, unseen, or the marvellous product of sudden passion, need I tell any man of honour that such a life is a punishment, and that the better the man is the greater is his punishment? I should think that men of honour would think this kind of punishment by life *worse* than punishment by death. Such a punishment the old Prophet suffered; although, as I believe, he repented, and began his repentance quickly. "Lay my bones beside his bones," showed, if you like, a *sentimental* identification of himself with the brother whom he had wronged and ruined. But show me the man who is devoid of sentiment, and I advise you to induce him to "sit" if you want a photograph of a demon. But he must, I think, have been more than a sentimentalist. His wishes were carried out, which shows that he did not change when he cooled. Some 300 years after, Josiah found him where he had wished to be laid, and found the memory of the event fresh after a lapse of time as great as from this hour to the Reformation! Is it wild to suppose that the years of his life which preceded that burial were given to warning against idolatry those amongst whom he dwelt, and to whom he had said that the things spoken by his deceived brother should surely come to pass?

But he was punished. That is what I have tried to prove. He was punished not by death, but by life. And now what may we learn from him as we think over ourselves? Always, I suppose, there are those who are too hard towards themselves, as well as those who are too lenient. There must be many—some in every congregation, I should think—who are in this position, namely: they are painfully conscious that for a certain time of their lives—an hour, a year, ten years—they did or they were what, when they look back, surprises and shames them. They think, as this old Prophet must have thought, of influences which long ago *might* have been used to help, and which *were* used to hinder. "Alas! my brother," may be their hearts' utterance as truly when memory presents the *moral* corpse as when sight presents the physical corpse. In either case the thought that they were instrumental is the cause of the anguish. Beyond this, they have two armies, so to speak, of consciousnesses which seem antagonistic. On the one hand they know that they have long since really turned to God, and that they are striving to set Him always before them; that they *have* asked and *are* asking the Saviour's pardon and His Spirit's aid, that there are times when they even *feel* themselves in the light of His countenance, warmed and enlightened by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness.

On the other hand is the certainty that they cannot *undo* the past. They cannot make it different from what it was. Almighty God Himself can no more rewrite their souls' history than He can tell a lie. Satan presses *this* upon those of whom I am thinking; and he adds what they feel to be true. "God," he says, "is punishing you in your life in spite of your repentance, your amendment, your prayers, and your sincerity; He has *not* accepted you. He hides His face from you. Make no more vain efforts; curse Him and die."

Here, my brother, Christ comes in to bruise the head of him who is thus through you—Christ's member—"bruising His heel." He says, "You may be forgiven and you are

forgiven, in spite of all. What you suffer *is* punishment for what I know, for what you know; but it is the punishment of a Father's discipline lest a worse thing happen you. Heed not the tempter's voice. Pray for strength to cling to the resolve of the tried Patriarch of olden time, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him'; and rest upon the perpetual fulfilment of the sustaining promise, 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.'"

Abijah

BY REV. J. T. DAVIDSON, D.D.

"In him there is found some good thing," etc.—1 Kings xiv. 13.

We have before us to-night an instance of early piety that is worth looking into. There are two royal persons of the name of Abijah mentioned in Old Testament history. One was the son of King Rehoboam, and his successor on the throne of Judah. He was a bad man, and though one might have supposed that good blood flowed in his veins (for, both on his father's and his mother's side, he was descended from King David), he yielded himself up to idolatry and its attendant immoralities to such an extent, indeed, that the historian in the second Book of Chronicles altered his name from Abijah to Abijam; in order, as Dr. Lightfoot thinks, to avoid introducing the sacred word Jah (for Jehovah) into the name of so unworthy a character. The other Abijah was a youth of very different spirit, and, though he came out of a bad nest, was a true child of grace. He was the young son of Jeroboam, and heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. A worse man than his father had rarely worn a crown upon his head. Scarcely had he seized the sceptre of government, than he forsook the worship of Jehovah, and not only gave himself up to gross idolatry, but compelled the people to follow his example. His name is notorious through all ages, as the man "who made Israel to sin."

To his son Abijah, Jeroboam was very tenderly attached. The lad took ill of a serious sickness, and his father was thrown into deep anxiety. Earnestly solicitous about the issue of the malady, Jeroboam sent his wife to one of the Prophets of the true God, to inquire whether his son would recover. Why did he send to *him*? Why did he not apply to one of the idol-gods he had himself set up at Beersheba and Dan, and whom he had commanded all the people to worship? Ah! it is not difficult to tell the reason. When adversity comes upon ungodly men, when sorrow visits their dwelling, then they discover how vain are their earthly confidences, and how little support these yield them. Then Isaiah's words are verified, "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them."

Heavy were the tidings with which his queen returned. She was instructed by the faithful Prophet to acquaint her husband that their entire family, with one solitary exception, should die by violence and in disgrace, unlamented and unmourned; should

Go down

To the vile dust from whence they sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.

"Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city shall the dogs eat: and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat: for the Lord hath spoken it."

The terrible prediction was fulfilled to the letter. Listen to the tragic story. "In the third year of Asa, king of Judah, did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead. And it came to pass when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by His servant the Prophet." To this fearful and wholesale extermination there was, as I have said, one solitary exception, and that exception was the dear and pious youth, of whom the Lord declared in my text, that "all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave (*i.e.*, shall die a natural death); because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel."

I. LOOK FOR A LITTLE AT THIS DESCRIPTION OF HIS PIETY.

"In him there is found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel." What, think you, might this "good thing" be? Certainly, it was not his rank, nor wealth, nor power, nor intellect. As regards all these, I have no reason to suppose that the other members of that house were at all inferior to himself. Ah! these things commend not a soul to God; and not less precious in His sight is the youth that has been born in a peasant's cottage or a miner's cabin, than the scion of a noble house, or the heir-apparent to earth's highest throne.

And, as this "good thing" was not any mere material endowment, so neither was it any mere moral excellence. It does not mean simply that Abijah was what the world calls "good-hearted," "a good-living lad"; that he was amiable and well-behaved; that, in the midst of abounding debauchery, he preserved his virtue unstained. This, indeed, would be much, but it would not be expressed in the peculiar language of the text; "the good thing" was a "good thing towards the Lord God of Israel," a gracious, a spiritual, a divine, a holy thing. It was something that sprang not out of nature, nor of the flesh, something that his father did not give him, something that he never learnt from the royal but dissolute court of Israel.

There are two things which, when found in a man, are good and acceptable to God. The first is *true repentance*, or what the Bible calls the "broken and contrite heart." Search the Scriptures through; you will find nothing of which it is said, as it is said of this, that it is well pleasing to the Lord—might this be the good thing that was found in Abijah? Some of you are apt to take a gloomy view of your own state, although the Spirit has been dealing graciously with you; you fear that you have neither part nor lot in Christ's salvation, though it is your earnest desire to become His followers. Oh, if you have nothing else to offer to God but the sacrifice of a contrite spirit, there is some good thing in you toward the Lord God of Israel; and He Who has begun the good work in you will perfect it unto the day of final redemption.

A second thing on which God specially sets the seal of His approbation is "*faith* in that one sacrifice which doth for sin atone." Amongst all the princes of the royal house, Abijah alone refused to worship the golden calves which his father had made. Jewish writers tell us that Abijah would not bow down to the idols, but insisted on worshipping the true God at Jerusalem. And when he tried, as best he could, to follow the ritual which Moses appointed, he doubtless saw therein, though it might be with dim and imperfect vision, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Who should one day die for the sins of the world. His faith might have been but a little spark, but that secured his acceptance before God. Possibly some of you are bemoaning your low spiritual state, and afraid to believe it possible that you are Christians; but if you have only been led to trample your own righteousness in the dust, and place your whole reliance upon Jesus as your substitute, then, amid all your unworthiness and imperfection, there is "some good thing" found in you: and He Who put it there will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

But without these two things, "repentance from dead works, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," there is nothing in you that God can approve. I have sometimes been charged with putting too little of Gospel truth into these monthly sermons—of dwelling too much upon your material interests, and on those qualities that are likely to secure you honour and success in this world; to-day, then, let there be no uncertain sound, let everyone in this large assembly ask of himself the double question, "Have I yet repented of my sins? Have I yet trusted my soul into the hands of the Lord Jesus?" for, if the answer is "No," then there is no good thing in you; you are still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

II. THERE ARE ONE OR TWO SPECIAL LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE CASE OF ABIJAH.

1. Do we not learn, for example, how real piety may exist under most adverse and unfavourable circumstances? Here was a youth, all of whose surroundings were of the worst possible character. An ungodly home, an idolatrous court, parents both wicked, every relative he had under the curse of God: why, you would say, piety could not live a day amid such conditions as these. Ah! the brightest diamonds have been found in the darkest mines, and the richest pearls in the deepest seas. Satan sometimes outwits himself. Sin is used to secure its own defeat. The very excess of Jeroboam's iniquity may have awakened disgust and recoil in the breast of his son. Even unconverted men are shocked by wickedness which exceeds their own. I have often been struck with the fact that young men who have left a godly home and a quiet neighbourhood, and have

seen with wonder the vice and irreligion to be met with in London, have at once become far more earnest and more decided here than they were before. This very boldness of vice has made religion seem more real. The contrast has become more vivid. They have felt they must choose their side. It would not do to be neutral.

The sooner you all feel this the better. A young man says, "I am not a rake; I am not a prodigal; without professing to be a believer, I am fairly virtuous in my life." My brother, you will allow me to say, if you do not profess to be a believer, then you profess to be an unbeliever. O, if Abijah, nursed and brought up in a very hell of depravity, yet found the way to God, with what an awful responsibility will you be crushed, if, with all the hallowed memories of a Christian home, and of the Sunday-school, and of the blessed sanctuary of your youthful days, you are living without God in the world?

2 Again, I learn from our subject, that even a young and brief life may be fruitful in blessing. Young as he was, the whole nation mourned for him. I know it has been common to speak of Abijah as cut off in infancy. This I believe to be a mistake; and to arise from a misconception of the meaning of the word "child," applied to him in this chapter. According to Old Testament usage, the word may denote a full-grown youth; and it is far from probable that, had he been but a little boy, there would have been so public a funeral, and so general a lamentation over him. He must have attained such a period of life as to be capable of showing the excellence of his character, and of rendering some public service; and, probably, his acts gave so good promise of his future career, that the best men in the country augured a happier time when, in the course of nature, he should come to the throne.

In the highest view of it, the length of life is not to be judged by the number of its years. It is possible for the longest life to be briefer than the shortest; and the smooth-cheeked youth may die older, that is, with more of life crowded into his brief history, than he whose stagnant and profitless existence drags on to an inglorious old age. That life is the longest—however limited the number of its years—in which God has been best served, and the world most benefited. What is more delightful than to see a man, at the very outset of life, addressing himself to some work or project whereby he may prove a blessing to others; not content to be a mere drone or selfist, but firmly determined to find some sphere of practical usefulness?

There is not a better feature of our time than the number of young men engaged in one form or another of Christian or philanthropic service. It does one's heart good to see the generous enthusiasm with which many a young fellow, who has but little time to himself, devotes that time to the public good, working busily in the cause of temperance, it may be, or in the Sunday-school, or in evangelistic effort, or in endeavours to get hold of other young men, and gather them under Christian influence. Noble fellows! God bless them, and give them a rich reward.

3. Finally, I learn from the brief story of Abijah, that piety in life is the only guarantee of peace in death. An early departure from this world is not a thing to be dreaded, provided your heart is right with God. It is a touching thought to me, as I look round on this assembly, most of whom are in the bloom of youthful vigour, that according to all the laws of probability, some of you will never reach life's prime. Ere a few years have gone, the cannon shot of death will have thinned these ranks. Nor is it the most robust that will be spared. When I look back in memory on those who sat on the same bench with me at school, and on those who were my fellow-students at college, I am struck with the fact that some of those who seemed the most stout and hardy have been the first to be called away. To which of us the summons will first come, none can tell; but it may be to you who appear the most likely to live. You cannot reckon on a single year; nay, not upon a day. Oh, my dear friends, if you would come to your grave in peace, be it sooner, or be it later, there must be found in you "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel."

The Widow of Zarephath

BY REV. G. F. DE TEISSIER, B.D.

"Arise, get thee to Zarephath," etc.—1 Kings xvii. 8, 9.

Our Blessed Lord alluded to this history when He preached, in the synagogue at Nazareth, for the first time after His consecration as "The Christ of God." He showed by it that the Almighty, notwithstanding His promises to particular people, persons, and nations, is free to work mercy where and how He will—that He is not confined to this or that place, this or that city, but may set forth His power and glory under every possible circumstance which His wisdom may determine. There was a proverb among the chosen people, "Physician, heal thyself," which seems to correspond to our proverb, "Charity begins at home." Your own people, your own neighbours, and your own kinsfolk have the first claim upon your kind services and saving help. He that would exercise charity aright must let those near him feel it before he goes further afield. All which is true enough in a general way, and must be acted upon as the rule of life; but there may be exceptions, and God and Christ have shown some, for Nazareth was not the place where the Saviour wrought His healing miracles, nor was it to a widow in Israel that God sent His Prophet Elijah. And yet, says the Lord Jesus, "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow."

One may see reasons for this. Elijah might be safer hidden in the borders of a foreign country than in any of the secret places of Ahab's kingdom—Christ might be safer at work in other towns than in Nazareth, where He had lived so long but not been believed in. But God may have other reasons than we can see, and Christ have acted on a deeper wisdom than we can fathom. Only let us adore His goodness, Who has opened "the door of faith to the Gentiles," and intimated as much when He sent Elijah to the widow of Zarephath—to a Gentile in preference to an Israelitish woman.

The famine seems to have reached the neighbouring country. The widow and her son are preparing to eat their last and die. There remains but a handful of meal and a few drops of oil: two or three sticks are gathered for the last fire, the last cake is to be baked, the last meal eaten; and then farewell, for the widow and her son, to this world and its joys and its sorrows! But "man's necessity is God's opportunity." The Prophet is sent; the widow commanded to sustain him. Did God speak to the widow? I think not—she had no revelation. It was not said to her in a dream, "Behold, a man of God shall come to thee, and thou shalt feed him." Yet says God, "*I have commanded*"; it is My will, and that has the force of the mightiest command. Go forth, My Prophet, and the Gentile widow shall sustain thee." He went, and as he came to the gate of the city, he saw, and by the Spirit of God knew, the widow to whom he was sent. He found her in extremities, yet asked for food. She did not refuse in so many words, but stated her distressed circumstances. It is more than human charity can do, to give the last morsel to a stranger, and see an only son starve for the want of it. But Elijah does not excuse her this trial—"Fear not: go and do as thou hast said"; but give to me first, and then "take for thyself and thy son." Bold words for a stranger to utter! but he adds a promise, in the name of the Lord God of Israel—"The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

The widow believed, and obeyed, and found the word of the Prophet true. God had prepared her heart, though she knew Him not; God had seen her affliction, though she sought not after Him; God comes to her help, though she never prayed to Him. Hers were false gods, hers a false worship, hers an untrue religion. But for His own glory, and to magnify His mercy, and to set forth His wisdom, God overlooks all this, and takes the widow, as it were, into partnership for the sustaining of His Prophet Elijah.

How many thoughts flow in upon the heart, while we read this history! How many lessons may we gather, for our comfort and encouragement in well-doing! Is any one sunk in abject poverty, straitened by distresses?—let him look to God. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Can He not save to the uttermost? Does He not put down

the mighty from their seat, and exalt them of low degree? Does He not fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich empty away? Ofttimes He leaves us in our sorrows and our troubles, till we have *ceased* to trust in an arm of flesh. Then, when earthly hopes have perished, human aids failed, all our prudence ended in vanity, all our friends forsaken us, no way of escape left, He gives us the Valley of Achor for a door of hope, He turns our mourning into joy, He glorifies His strength in our weakness, and magnifies the riches of His love out of the utterness of our misery. Many a man has cried unto God out of the deep, and been heard on High : friends have been raised up in unexpected quarters ; help given from hands that we thought were powerless ; food granted when famine stood at the door ; life restored under the very grasp of death. " Man's necessity has been God's opportunity." The deeper man's distress, the greater God's salvation. But think not only of the body—think rather of the *soul*. When earth has shown us that it has not happiness ; when we have asked of all things in this world, and the sea and the land and the sky have answered, " It is not in us " ; when lusts have run their utmost ; when the passions have wearied themselves with vanities, and the heart has beguiled itself with lies ; when the tossed and worn soul cries out for very wretchedness, " Woe is me ! I am undone "—then from the lowest depth of anguish God can save ; then not seldom has He kindled repentance and lifted up the gross thick veil of darkness from before the heart of man, that he may see his true happiness and learn to know his God ; then, when he has spent his little all—when the last two or three sticks have been gathered, and the last effort made to satisfy the cravings of a hungry spirit, God has sent, by the hand of His messenger, and said unto that soul, " Live, and I will sustain thee." O my brethren, may that message come to every soul in this parish ; may the voice of Christ reach the hearts of all, saying, " I am the Bread of Life : he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst ! "

Again, does any one think himself too poor to help a neighbour?—learn from the widow of Sarepta how much may be done with a very little. I have known many a poor person careful to give an alms on every occasion which presented itself, and they have had *their* blessings from the Lord they thus tried to honour. They have not, indeed, become richer in the eyes of men, but they are richer before God : they have, as it were, in the grace of Christ, bought, by these acts of self-denial, " the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Does it ever strike some of you, who leave almsgiving to the wealthy altogether, that the Lord our Saviour blessed the widow with His praise for the farthing which she gave for the Temple service? Be not afraid, O poor ones of my flock, of almsgiving ; it may bring you a fuller measure of blessings than you think for. The widow of Zarephath took in a stranger, to share, as she thought, her last morsel with her son. What a blessed hospitality was this to her ! How must she have wondered day by day, as the meal in the barrel increased the more it was consumed, and the oil in the cruse flowed on the more she used it ! But blessed more she was on this account—that she heard and learnt more of the God of Israel through His Prophet : she had received a man of God into her cottage, and God received her into His own good keeping. He tried her, indeed, with sorrow and deep distress ; but He gave her to know Himself as a God of Truth. Think how many opportunities and means we all have of showing true neighbourly feeling, and doing works of kindness among ourselves ; and be sure that the more you encourage these, the happier, the wiser, and the better you will become in the love of Christ. Remember, it is written of hospitality, that thereby some have entertained Angels unawares.

Once more, we may learn, from the widow of Zarephath, to " beware of covetousness : for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." We do not hear that the widow was made rich, or raised above her lowly station, because she had entertained the Prophet of the God of Israel. It would seem that the measure of God's bounty was to give her *enough and no more*—enough meal and enough oil for the day as it came. Let us not expect more for ourselves, and then we shall not be disappointed ; but let us bear in mind, that what is enough for one is not enough for another, because God gives us different stations in life and, therewith, different means. Let not the rich dispise the poor, nor let the poor envy the rich, but let all be clothed with humility," and let each thank God, the Great Dispenser of life and this life's goods, for what he has, and for what he can gain, and for what he can enjoy. And let each, when he prays, " Give us this day our daily bread," submit himself to the fatherly care of Him, Who fed Elijah at first by the ministry of ravens, and afterwards fed him by the hand of a humble widow ; and suffered neither him, nor her, nor her son to want for

bread, while Hé visited the wicked with a famine. And pray that your souls may be fed with the Word of Life—may Christ be as the meal, and the Holy Spirit as the oil!—that day by day you may have enough to sustain the spiritual life, enough for the wants of each, enough for the capacity of each—enough to set forward your own salvation, and to show forth the riches of God's goodness, unto the praise and glory of His Holy Name, for ever and ever.

The Widow of Zarephath

BY REV. FRANCIS BOURDILLON, M.A.

"Arise, get thee to Zarephath," etc.—1 Kings xvii. 9.

In a time of famine, Elijah was miraculously fed at the brook Cherith. But after a time the brook dried up; then he was told to go elsewhere. He was commanded to go to *Zarephath*; there he would find a fresh provision made for him.

Unknown to Elijah God had already given His orders. But to whom? To a poor widow-woman there. Elijah did not know, and she did not know yet; but the command had gone forth, and those whom it concerned would know in due time.

Yet how unlikely a person to be appointed to feed the Prophet! She herself was in extreme want. As he drew near to the gate of the city he saw her, and doubtless was informed by an inward voice that this was the widow-woman who was to feed him. But did Elijah know what she was doing—gathering fuel to dress the last meal for herself and her son? If so, it showed strong faith that he should ask her for food for herself? How was she to feed *him*, who had but a handful for herself? If he did not know it before she spoke, he soon did know it from her own lips. The meal-tub was all but empty, there were but a few drops of oil left in the cruse; one more meal for her and her son, and then they must die. This was her pitiful tale.

Not so. "Thus saith the Lord" prevailed over all in the mind of Elijah; and soon it was shown to prevail in every deed. For all she said, Elijah persevered: "Fear not; go, and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me; and after make for thee and for thy son." And then followed the promise: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

Now the woman believed also. "And she went, and did according to the saying of Elijah." She took the handful of meal and the drop of oil that were to have fed her and her son, and dressed them for the Prophet; but when that last handful was gone the barrel was not empty, and when the oil had been used there was still some left. And so it went on: "The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake by Elijah." "And she, and he, and her house, did eat many days"—a full year, according to the marginal reading.

"According to the word of the Lord." In that lies the secret of this miracle, and of all miracles. It is the power of the Lord that works miracles, the word of the Lord that promises and declares them. It was so when the Lord twice fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes. It is so with us in that constant exercise of almighty power by which we are fed every day. Why do not our barrel and cruse fail, but because the Lord keeps them full? But for Him, they *would* fail; but He teaches us to ask every day that they may not fail ("Give us this day our daily bread"), and they fail not. Nay, so gracious is He that He keeps from failing the barrel and cruse of many an one who never asks Him, never thanks Him, never thinks of Him as the Giver of all. This provision lasted "many days"—a whole year perhaps; but for how many days and years have *our* meal and oil come to us? All our life long; and always from the same hand, and by the same word.

But so it had been in fact with both the Prophet and the widow all their lives. Before Elijah was thus fed at Zarephath, he had been fed at Cherith; before he was fed at Cherith, he had been fed wherever he was: and before ever the famine came, and she found her wants supplied by a miracle, the widow's wants had always been supplied, and by the same power and word. Oh, let none forget this! Let us give thanks at every meal, as for a fresh supply; and let our thanks be *real* thanks.

Yet, as for the widow of Zarephath, so to many besides, there comes times of *special* need. Many have known such times, with regard even to the necessities of life; and not

the so-called poor only, but some of almost all classes. A landlord has been brought into straits by his rents being lowered, or not paid; a farmer by low prices, or the failure of crops; a tradesman by "bad times," or bad debts; a stock-holder by the failure of dividends; the breaking of a bank has brought ruin to numbers; a strike has caused want in many a home; slackness of work, illness and other things have driven many a mechanic hard, and many a farm-labourer too. Many such cases come to light; more are unknown. But numbers have at times been brought so low as not to know whence the next day's supply was to come. There was but a handful of meal in the barrel, and a few drops of oil left in the cruse.

Have you ever known such a time, and are you now brought out of it? Who delivered you? Who sent you the next day's food, and the next, and so on till the present time? The same gracious God as made the widow's meal not to fail. He put forth His hand for you, as He did for her. He wrought no miracle, it is true; He made use of ordinary means; but the supply and the relief came from Him. Look back on that time. Recall your distress, your almost despair. And now it is *past*, and you are in comfort. Give thanks to God for His goodness. Perhaps He was not even sought: yet He came to your help.

But it may be that you are in straits *now*; at this very time want presses on you, or threatens to. You read this story, and you ask, "May I take this promise to myself? Will my meal and oil (the little I have left) not fail?"

You have every reason to believe that it will be with you even as it was with this woman; you have many invitations to call upon God in your need, many promises that He will hear you. There will be no visible miracle, and no special messenger. In your despondency, when doing your best (though with a heavy heart) to eke out what is left, you will see no Prophet appear; but, without a Prophet, you have God's messages already in His Word. Take it in hand, and see what He says. He puts this prayer into your lips, "Give us this day our daily bread"; He says, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure" (Isa. xxxiii. 16); "The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the Lord Thy God" (Isa. li. 14); "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Isa. xli. 17). If you will believe, God's promise to you is as clear and sure as to this woman. Your barrel and cruse shall not fail.

But there are many wants beside that of bread. Often we are in want of comfort, guidance, wisdom; often things seem against us, and we see no way out of difficulty; and always we are in need of grace and strength. Of whatever kind our need may be, we may take to ourselves the promises of God. He is almighty, and one kind of need is as easy for Him to supply as another. Meal and oil form a simple need, yet in this case a miracle must be wrought to supply it; other needs may be more complicated, but all is simple to infinite wisdom and power.

Those small resources that are left you, seeming almost none; the mere possibility of relief; the faint ray of hope; they are your handful of meal and drop of oil. God can cause them to last, and increase and multiply them, and make them to be enough. It was so easy for the widow to believe, when she and her house had eaten many days; but not so easy on the day the assurance was given. It is always easy to believe when the promise has been fulfilled. But believe it before it is fulfilled, believe it now. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29).

Was this *all* the blessing that came to the widow of Zarephath through Elijah? Oh, no. There were at least three besides.

First, she had the honour of supporting God's servant. The ravens were appointed to do so before; it might have pleased God to employ them still, at Zarephath as well as at Cherith, or to make use of other creatures; but it did please Him to employ this widow, and not merely to put her to this work, but also to give her a heart for it. When God relieves us, and gives us plenty, and sends us comfort, let us not spend all on ourselves. Let us think it an honour to use His gifts in His service, as He in His providence seems to point out. If not called to feed a Prophet, there is something else we are to do.

Secondly, the widow's son was brought to life. If Elijah had not been there, the story would have had a sad end—the death of the widow's boy. When God sends us a blessing, and we receive it, and believe and obey, and use it according to His will, what a train of blessings may follow! Personal blessings and family blessings, temporal blessings and spiritual—he who believes and obeys may expect them all. God does not bless once and then leave off blessing.

Thirdly, the woman, who up to this time believed with but an imperfect faith, at length believed fully : " Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

Thus one blessing leads to another. Thus a temporal good, rightly received, may become the means of spiritual good. Contrast this woman's state when first we saw her with her state now. We saw her a poor sad woman gathering sticks for her last meal, and knowing but little of the true God, for Zarephath was outside the land of Israel; we part from her as a believer, knowing and trusting in the Lord; her barrel and cruse have never failed, her son is alive from the dead, and she has been for a whole year, and doubtless will be to the end of her days, employed in God's service, and taking part in His work in the world.

And all of God's grace! " Many widows were in *Israel*; but unto none of *them* was Elias sent, but unto Sarepta, a city of *Sidon*, unto a woman that was a widow" (Luke iv. 26). She was not outside the grace and favour of God; nor are any of *us*.

Ahaz

BY REV. J. T. DAVIDSON, D.D.

"*This is that king Ahaz.*"—2 *Chronicles* xxviii. 22.

We have before us now the worst of all the kings that occupied the throne of David. He came to the throne at twenty years of age, and died at thirty-six; and these sixteen years—the very flower of a man's lifetime—instead of being given to noble pursuits, were squandered on profligacy and every form of impiety, as though he did not care how he disgraced his royal lineage, degraded his country, and defied the God of Heaven. In vain did he recall his pious father's example; in vain did the holy Prophet Isaiah advise, warn, and rebuke him; in vain did God send heavy judgments upon him; on he went, from bad to worse, from worse to worst, till he sank into an early and dishonoured grave—his very bones being refused a resting-place in the sepulchres of his fathers.

Poor, miserable reprobate! possessing neither courage, nor prudence, nor patriotism, nor self-respect; not even a decent regard for the traditions of his family; one of the few men of history of whom not a single good thing is recorded; living with none to love him; dying with none to lament him. "This was that king Ahaz!"

Now the first thing that strikes me about this young man is the remarkable fact that he came of so pious a parentage—that so foul a bird should have come out of so good a nest.

Of his father Jotham it is recorded that he "did right in the sight of the Lord." He was a truly good man. His grandfather, Uzziah, had also been a man of piety, though Jotham, we are told, was yet more decided in his principles; and the historian declares of him that he "became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God."

Both father and grandfather, then, were men of God. Ahaz ought to have had good blood in his veins; he came of a good stock. His early days were spent in a religious home. He had the advantage of a holy example. We cannot doubt that parental influence would all be used to lead him in the right way. If there is anything in heredity, in the transmission of tendencies from father to son, we should have expected Ahaz to be a decided character, a true-hearted servant of God.

Certainly, it added greatly to his responsibility. It was an awful aggravation of his guilt that he had been brought up in a pious home. Oh, there is no earthly blessing to be compared to this!

Well do some of you know it. Of a thousand things you have to be thankful for, this is one of the greatest, that the home of your childhood was such a holy and happy spot. What sweet and blessed influences gathered round you!

But, where such advantages are thrown away, such influences thwarted, there is generally a rebound. If the child of godly parentage turns out bad, he is generally an exceptional reprobate. He plunges deeper into sin than all his fellows. He is wilder in his profligacy, more daring in his profanity. He is an utter scapegrace, in the most literal sense of the word, that is, one who has escaped the grace that seemed to run in his ancestral line. Christian birth abused becomes a curse. In the natural course of things, the youth who has most resisted the Spirit becomes the greatest slave of the devil.

It is a law of character. Just as the resistance of temptations proves the strengthening of virtue, so the defiance of holy influence and example proves the deepening of depravity. Some of the most loathsome men I have ever known have been persons who, with everything in their favour, have recoiled from a moral and religious life. They have become desperately wicked. Devils have come in to occupy the place from which the Spirit of God has been expelled.

If a parent has been pre-eminent for his saintliness, and his son goes to the bad, you may expect the latter to turn out one of the most vile and hardened of sinners. Tell me the gracious influence he has resisted, and I will give you the gauge of his depravity.

The next notable lesson which we carry away with us is this, that a man may become so hardened in sin that even trouble and affliction will only drive him further from God.

Mark what this very verse declares, "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." It often happens that a man's attitude toward his Maker does not appear until some calamity befalls him. "You must not suppose," said a thorough man of the world, "that I hate God. No, sir, you will not make me believe that. I am a sinner, I know, as we all are, but, take my word for it, I'm all right at heart; I have no enmity to God."

That was said when all was going prosperously with him. But a few months afterwards a series of calamities befel him; the money he had amassed was swept away; and, as he stood amid the ruins of his earthly hopes, he with horrible profanity cursed God to His face. A man may get into such a moral condition that trouble only sours his spirit. He becomes angry with the Almighty. He becomes sullen in temper, or plunges into more desperate iniquity. Nothing is a truer touchstone of character than the way in which we are affected by heavy affliction. The same fire that softens the wax hardens the clay. It has again and again been observed on the occasion of a shipwreck, when the lives of all on board were in eminent peril, that the near prospect of eternity, whilst it led some to fervent prayer, drove others to the rum bottle. When the great plague was raging in London, vice assumed hideous and diabolic forms. The churches, indeed, were thronged by one class, but another class gave themselves to riotous excess. Men even followed the dead-cart through the streets, singing profane and ribald songs. Certain parts of the city were like a hell on earth. Do not suppose, then, that the chastisements of God always humble the sinner. If you resist the strivings of the Spirit through years of health and prosperity, you are not likely to turn to God when the cloud of sorrow gathers over your path.

I have seen young men stricken down in their sins, and seemingly more set against religion than ever.

Then again, the career of Ahaz shows us that when a man has cast off God, the very things that promise him satisfaction may prove his destruction.

We are sure to worship some object. If it be not Jehovah, then it will be an idol of man's creation.

This young blasphemer turned to the gods of Damascus, and said (see the verse that follows our text), "I will sacrifice to them, that they may help thee." "But," it is added, "they were the ruin of him." Oh, how true to the life! How exact a picture of what we have seen with our own eyes, over and over again! A young man casts off the fear of God, scoffs at the religion of his fathers, gives himself up to bad company, to loose living, to late hours, to card-playing and gambling, to theatre-going, and every kind of imaginary pleasure; and with what result? Ah! The story of Ahaz is just repeated over again: "They are the ruin of him." Ruin of his character; ruin of his prospects; ruin of his health; ruin of his immortal soul!

You may well look uneasy and alarmed, my boy, for you are just beginning the fatal course. I tell you it is a crucial time with you, if you do not put your foot down firm, and vow you will keep back from the first steps of vice; every week lessens your chances of a safe, and happy, and honourable career.

Remember, one thread broken in the garment of your virtue, no one can tell how much of it will speedily unravel. Passions you have, awful passions: but grapple with them now, and by God's grace you will vanquish them. Yield, and they will become fiercer, and will overmaster you.

An old man once pointed out to a young lad four shrubs of unequal size. "Go, pull up the least one," he said. In a moment it was up by the roots. "Now the next." Ah, that did not come so easily. "Now the next." It seemed as if No. 3 could not be torn up. But at last, with a tremendous effort, up it came. "Now try the fourth," said he.

In vain the lad tugged and pulled. His face flushed with the strain; he gave it up as hopeless. "This, my son," said the old man, "is just what happens with our passions. There is a time when they are under our control; but if we offer no resistance, if we indulge them, and let them cast their roots deep into our being, we shall find they have become too strong for us, and that we are helpless before them."

Now, I appeal to you to nip your lower appetites in the bud, and let your higher nature dominate your life. Don't let me hear you say, this is grandmotherly advice, and young men must have their fling and their spree. I would be a heartless creature if, knowing what I have seen, I did not entreat and implore every youth before me, who has not yet lost the priceless jewel of personal purity, to fight and resist to the death "those lusts which war against the flesh," and which, indulged, have been the ruin of hundreds of as fine fellows as I now see before me.

If you will run on to destruction, at least you shall not go unwarned; I point the finger now to one in whose history not a single good thing is recorded—who lived unloved and died unlamented. "This is that king Ahaz."

If one says to me, "How can you account for a man turning out such a scapegrace, whose father was a devout servant of God?" I think an explanation is not difficult to find. Jotham, good man as he was, seemed to devote all his energies to matters outside of his own family and people. "He built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers." He was much engaged in wars with the Ammonites, and he devoted himself to the embellishing of the Temple. But of the internal administration of his kingdom and of the upbringing of his family we have not a word. Need we wonder, then, to read that "the people did yet corruptly," and that his own son turned out so ill?

Now, my brothers, gird you like men; be strong. Beware of what Tennyson calls "sins of emptiness." Let your hearts be preoccupied by the grace of God, so that there will be no room for evil thoughts. Grasp the hand of Christ held out to you, and go from this place determined to live a noble life, and full of confidence in that promised grace from above, "which is able to keep you from falling, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified."

The Old Testament Saints and Their Bible

BY REV. JAMES ELDER CUMMING, D.D.

"These all died in faith," etc.—Hebrews xi. 13.

We have been considering, chapter by chapter, the lives and characters of some of the saints of old; and the above verse is what the Spirit of God, writing in the New Testament, and in full view of our knowledge of the Gospel standard of holiness, has said of them. It is even in the remembrance of the unapproachable life of the Lord Jesus Himself that the Holy Ghost had so spoken concerning them. It is a light thing to add to this that we all bring to the discussion of such characters our own knowledge of the manner of life of Christ and His Apostles. Do as we will we cannot but test and measure the men of the past, sometimes consciously, sometimes insensibly, by the standard of the Gospel. Nor can we confine our attention to the few who have been named and considered in these pages one by one; for the same chapter in Hebrews gives virtually the same testimony to the unnamed women and unknown men who are grouped together in the verses at its close as to those who are specially mentioned.

It is not necessary to do more now than refer to the men who have been individually described in the preceding pages. But let us recall some of these illustrious names, that we may think of them together and not apart: the godly Enoch, to whom this rarest testimony is given that by faith for three hundred years he "pleased God"; the great founder of the Jewish race, Abraham, father of all them that believe; Isaac, most faultless of the patriarchs, most submissive, and most unworldly; Joseph, in whom the Spirit of God was, pure amid impurity, a blessing and a joy wherever he went; Moses wisest, and perhaps greatest of the Jewish race; David, the man after God's own heart; and Jonathan, whose love, beyond a woman's, surpassed and exceeded the tenderness of David. And what shall I more say? For the time indeed would fail to write of Elijah, the Prophet of fire and of faith; and of Elisha, with a double portion of his

master's spirit; and of Isaiah, the fire-touched messenger of the Most High; and of Jeremiah, the Prophet of tears; and of Daniel, the man greatly beloved, with garments unspotted in a heathen court, in whom enemies could find no other fault than that he was a man of prayer. Take these men together, not as single stars, but as a galaxy; and let us seriously ask whether in Christian grace of almost any sort, men of later days can be found to outshine and to surpass them? In what sort of virtue, or beauty of character, can we find better men even in the history of the Church of Christ? Is it in courage? Let the names of Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and Daniel answer the question. Is it in renouncing the world, martyr-like, at God's word? Let Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and the three Jews in Babylon reply. Is it in patience? Job's early years and crushing affliction suggest an answer. Is it in purest and most unselfish chivalry? Can we find anything to surpass the Bayard of Scripture story, Jonathan, the prince of Israel?

We ask, on what did these holy men feed their souls? What was the secret of their purity and strength? They could not feed on air. They could not be sustained by the world, which would only tempt them to evil. They could not be self-sustained, for their hearts were by nature not less impure than ours. What was the silent fountain which made these green and fruitful spots amid the universal desert of ancient history? The answer to this must be, their personal knowledge of the holy God and their faith in Him.

The secret of their life was faith. They trusted a God Whom they knew, Whose law was before them, Whose word was guiding them, Whose strength was keeping them, Whose love was dwelling in them. They reached that knowledge of God and attained to that faith in Him through the Old Testament Scriptures, in so far as these existed in their day. If men cannot find such teaching there now, it is their loss. But by this holy book the saints of old came to know God, our God, Christ's God, the Father. And it was in this knowledge, service, and fellowship, and by these alone that they lived. They could find the sustenance of their souls only in the revelation which had been given them; and if their souls found it, why, it must have been there.

But it may be said that the Bible is a progressive book, growing plainer and fuller as it goes on, and that there is a great advance in its teaching from Genesis to Revelation. Without denying that this is true, there are some qualifications which must be added to the admission, if we are not to be misled by it. For instance, it is not true that there is any contradiction between the earlier and the later parts of the Word. There is absolutely no opposition in spiritual teaching between the Old Testament and the New.

Again, it is the case that some of the most spiritual teachings of Scripture are to be found in the Old Testament. Is there, for instance, anything in the whole volume which can be said to be a deeper or truer account of God than that which He Himself revealed to Moses?—"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth"? (See how these gentle, loving, almost New Testament aspects of the Deity are insisted on!) "Keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin" (all kinds of sin to be pardoned—none too dark or too deadly! Yet mark how the needful corrective and warning come in, as describing a Holy God, Who is Judge as well as Father), "and will by no means clear the guilty."

Then how important and significant it is, that when Jesus Christ would reveal to man the highest and deepest aspect of the Divine law, He has only to select words already found in the Old Testament books, the one from Leviticus and the other from Deuteronomy—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart" (Deut. vi. 5), "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix. 18). How carefully men must talk of the progressive teaching of the Bible when they find those words in its early pages!

I am not careful to reply to the objection that in the point of dealing with enemies the New Testament seems to set up a much higher standard than the Old, and that, tried by it, the position taken by Deborah, and by David, and in various Psalms, is not the highest. We must distinguish between the experience of the saints and the law for the saints; and while we must admit that, in the point specified, the experience was not perfect, it is quite another thing to say that the law did not require it to be better than it was. "To love our neighbour as ourselves," and to regard every man, even an enemy, as a neighbour, is the law which Moses issues, as well as Christ. None of the elders fully obeyed it; but I know of none of the New Testament saints either who did so. And I have not yet known it fully obeyed even among the doubters and questioners of the present generation.

The fact is that the New Testament differs from the Old, not so much in the new matter which it teaches concerning God and the soul, as in what it drops and leaves behind. All the Jewish ceremonials, the outward sacrifices, the daily rites, fall away, and the sphere of duty remains. The scaffolding is removed, and the great dome of truth is seen standing alone.

Yet no doubt there is a difference between what was known to the elders and what is patent to ourselves. In olden time, if I might put the difference in a sentence, God revealed Himself in the cloud by day and in the fire by night; in these later days He revealed Himself by the great Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." But let us go a little farther into detail, and ask in what respects does the spiritual teaching of the Bible advance after the time of the elders?

1. I answer, first, that faith was at first more in the dark, and that it comes out into the open afterwards. Think for a little of the way of salvation, and see what a great difference there is in the knowledge of it. In the Old Testament it was plainly taught that every sinner needed forgiveness, and that God was ready to grant it to the penitent. All the saints had that experience. Nothing in the New Testament is clearer than some of the Psalms in teaching that. There was sin in every man that needed to be taken away; because "there was not a just man upon the earth, who did good, and sinned not."

But the question how sin was taken away, and how God could forgive, was never made known. The problem was not set, much less solved, in former days. Men were content with the simple declaration that it was so, that it could be done, and had not come the length of questioning how? At all events, the way by which God could pardon was very dimly taught. It was shadowed forth here and there—remarkably as we now see—but how faint must have been the indications to those who lived before the coming of the Messiah. The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement under the law showed the sins laid upon the heads of the two goats, one of which was put to death, and the other sent away, with his load of guilt, into the wilderness. The blood sprinkled on the doors in Egypt showed that it was only by being under the blood that any could escape; and that it was when God saw the blood that He could pass by without smiting the "sinner with destruction." The offerings day by day on the altar pointed continually to the method of forgiveness by laying sin on a substitute whose death was the means of deliverance. And that part of Isaiah which preached the Gospel 700 years before Calvary, taught men the doctrines of atonement, of substitution, and of intercession. Yet of the Jewish people how few there were who could discern amid these shadows the precious truths which they represented as in Divine pictures! and how many, who felt that they must trust the Lord in their death, only knowing that He had forgiven and accepted them, but not knowing how!

2. Hence our second reply to the question, How far was spiritual truth progressive in the Scriptures? is, that probably only a very few attained to the holiness and comfort which we have spoken of as known to Jewish saints. Of course, in any case, and at any time, men like the saints of old must have been few in number. Among the Jewish people even those who served God must have been living at a comparatively low level of faith and service. The bulk of the pious Jews must have been very deficient in the peace and comfort of soul which are enjoyed by Christians now. A few lived in the light of such books as the Psalms and Isaiah, but they must have been few!

3. And again it may be answered, that in the Old Testament time faith required and received helps in its exercise which it does not now possess. These helps were twofold. The first was, inspiration for their teachers—not merely as God's ministers now carry the messages which they have received from Him in personal communion; but the holy men of old were openly moved and directed by the Holy Ghost, and spake infallibly under His charge, Thus saith the Lord. In a sense in which no other men ever spake, the writers of both Testaments did this, because it was needed for these times of twilight to be a help to faith that was living in the dark, or only beginning to see; to show what God meant, and what God would have as His purpose for men. The second help which was thus given was that of miracles. They are numerous in the Old Testament. But it is at certain periods only, not at all. We can trace in most cases the special need which calls for them, and we can see how they were less needful at other times. Periods like that of Moses, where the people were to be delivered from Egypt and a great new national life was to begin; and like that of Elijah, when the tide of idolatry that had been sweeping over the land was to be turned back—these were full of miracles.

But when the Prophets were commissioned to give their message, and to put it in writing, so that the people might possess it and pause over it—then they disappeared. Of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel it is true, as of John the Baptist, that they did no miracles. I think but one is recorded in connection with Isaiah, and that one is only announced by him. For a little they appeared again in the trying time of Daniel, after which they are no more till Christ Himself appeared, and testimony was needed for Him and His truth. Whenever faith required help in the dark times of Israel, the double help of inspired messengers and of miraculous deeds was given, that the men of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

It is true, then, that there is a certain increasing light as we pass on through the pages of Scripture; but it was a light, even from the beginning, that was sufficient to show men how to serve the only true God: and then faith was aided in such a way as to bring them everything that their souls needed for peace or holiness.

What, then, in conclusion, are the practical lessons which rise from the subject of this chapter? Is it not so that our fuller light has made it easier for us to know and serve God; that we should not merely learn (like the olden saints) that there is forgiveness for our sins, but should know that forgiveness comes through the blood of Christ and the sacrifice of Calvary; that we have the whole Apostolic teaching as to the bearing of sin by the Son of God, and the blotting out of the transgressions of every one who trusteth in Him; nay, that we read the very story of His death upon the Cross, and see Him hanging as our Substitute? Should not this indeed bring home to the youngest, the simplest among us that Divine lesson, how our sins may be taken away, and our souls saved, and our hearts cleansed? And can there be (it is a solemn question) can there be any excuse for the man among us who finds himself without a Saviour, and without peace made for Eternity?

But there is another lesson. We have seen in our review of the past and its saints to what great heights of holiness, what nobleness of character, what serenity of faith, what zeal for God's glory, men attained in Old Testament times. Their advantages were smaller, their vision of truth much dimmer, and the provision made for them much less perfect than ours. And now, are we to regard it as a necessary thing that we must fall short of them, and so far short? Are there to be no more such men as Enoch, as Joseph, as David, as Elijah? Is the New Testament dispensation unable to ripen the faith, or to quicken the spiritual pulse, as did the Old? Are the times of the Spirit to fall for ever behind the morning of types and ceremonies in the men they produce, and in the saints which characterize them? Has the morning which broke over Pentecost passed for ever into the cold and cloudy light of a northern winter day? Surely it should not be so. There is still "grace abounding" for the children of God. There are still paths of difficulty, reaching high up the Delectable Mountains, to be scaled by the Christian pilgrims. There are still lives to be lived, labours to be done, and deaths to be died for Christ, even as when Daniel prayed or when Paul testified.

It is no dream to be "all for Christ"; to have zeal for God's house eating up a man's soul; to have the sacred fire in our bones that will not keep still; to have Christ in the heart, the life, strength, and purity of it. Must we wait for days of persecution and danger before we know the power of Divine love? Or shall we, daring all now, accepting all now, go forth "bearing His reproach," and trusting Him to keep us His true bond-servants, both in life and death? So be it; yea, so must it be, if we too would gain the Spirit's record, and "obtain a good report," and have our names entered on that unseen page of God's Book, which tells of the New Testament and latter-day saints who have lived by faith in the Son of God.

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